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THE EARTHLY PARADISE,



THE
EARTHLY PARADISE

A POEM.

BY
WILLIAM MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

POPULAR EDITION.
IN TEN PARTS.

PART II.

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING,
THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS.
THE PROUD KING.

NEW IMPRESSION.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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THE MAN BORN TO BE KING.

ARGUMENT.

It was foretold to a great king, that he who should reign after him should be low-born and poor ; which thing came to pass in the end, for all that the king could do.

A KING there was in days of old
 Who ruled wide lands, nor lacked for gold,
 Nor honour, nor much longed-for praise,
 And his days were called happy days,
 So peaceable his kingdoms were,
 While others wrapt in war and fear
 Fell ever unto worse and worse.

Therefore his city was the nurse
 Of all that men then had of lore,
 And none were driven from his door
 That seemed well skilled in anything ;
 So of the sages was he king ;
 And from this learned man and that,
 Little by little, lore he gat,
 And many a lordless, troubled land
 Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand.

Midst this it chanced that, on a day,
Clad in his glittering gold array,
He held a royal festival ;
And nigh him in his glorious hall
Beheld his sages most and least,
Sitting much honoured at the feast.
But mid the faces so well known,
Of men he well might call his own,
He saw a little wizened man
With face grown rather grey than wan
From lapse of years, beardless was he,
And bald as is the winter tree ;
But his two deep-set, glittering eyes
Gleamed at the sight of mysteries
None knew but he ; few words he said,
And unto those small heed was paid ;
But the king, young, yet old in guile,
Failed not to note a flickering smile
Upon his face, as now and then
He turned him from the learned men
Toward the king's seat, so thought to know
What new thing he might have to show ;
And presently, the meat being done,
He bade them bring him to his throne,
And when before the throne he stood,
He said, " We deem thy coming good ;
What is thine art, canst thou in rhyme
Tell stories of the ancient time ?
Or dost thou chronicle old wars ?

Or know'st thou of the change of stars?
Or seek'st thou the transmuting stone?
Or canst thou make the shattered bone
Grow whole, and dying men arise
And live as long as thou the wise?
Or what gift dost thou bring me here,
Where nought but men of lore are dear
To me and mine?"

“O King,” said he,
“But few things know I certainly,
Though I have toiled for many a day
Along the hard and doubtful way
That bringeth wise men to the grave:
And now for all the years I gave,
To know all things that man can learn,
A few months learned life I earn,
Nor feel much liker to a god
Than when beside my sheep I trod
Upon the thymy, wind-swept down.
Yet am I come unto thy town
To tell thee somewhat that I learned
As on the stars I gazed, and yearned
To cast this weary body off,
With all its chains of mock and scoff
And creeping death—for as I read
The sure decrees with joy and dread,
Somewhat I saw writ down of thee,
And who shall have the sovereignty
When thou art gone.”

"Nay," said the King,
"Speak quick and tell me of the thing."

"Sire," said the sage, "thine ancient line
Thou holdest as a thing divine,
So long and undisturbed it is.
But now shall there be end to this.
For surely in my glittering text
I read that he who shall sit next,
On this thine ancient throne and high,
Shall be no better born than I
Whose grandsire none remembereth,
Nor where my father first drew breath."

"Yea," said the King, "and this may be .
Yet, O Sage, ere I credit thee,
Some token certes must thou show,
Or tell me what I think to know,
Alone, among all folk alive ;
Then surely great gifts will I give
To thee, and make thee head of all
Who watch the planets rise and fall."

"Bid these stand backward from thy throne,"
The sage said, "then to thee alone
Long hidden matters will I tell ;
And then, if thou believest, well—
And if thou dost not—well also ;
No gift I ask, but leave to go,
For strange to me is this thy state,
And for thyself, thou well may'st hate
My crabbed age and miserv."

“ Well,” said the King, “ let this thing be ;
And ye, my masters, stand aback !
For of the fresh air have I lack,
And in my pleasance would I walk
To hearken this grave elder’s talk
And gain new lore.”

Therewith he rose
And led the way unto a close,
Shaded with grey-leaved olive-trees ;
And when they were amidst of these
He turned about and said, “ Speak, friend,
And of thy folly make an end,
And take this golden chain therefore.”

“ Rightly thou namest my weak lore,”
The Sage said, “ therefore to the end
Be wise, and what the fates may send
Take thou, nor struggle in the net
Wherein thine helpless feet are set !
—Hearken ! a year is well-nigh done
Since, at the hottest of the sun,
Stood Antony beneath this tree,
And took a jewelled cup of thee,
And drank swift death in guise of wine :
Since he, most trusted of all thine,
At last too full of knowledge grew,
And chiefly, he of all men knew
How the Earl Marshal Hugh had died
Since he had drawn him on to ride
Into a bushment of his foes.

To die amidst the rain of blows."

"Thou knowest that by me he died,"
The King said, "how if now I cried,
Help! the magician slayeth me?
Swiftly should twenty sword-blades be
Clashing within thy ribs, and thou
Nearer to death than even now."

"Not thus, O King, I fear to die,"
The Sage said; "Death shall pass me by
Many a year yet, because perchance,
I fear not aught his clattering dance,
And have enough of weary days.
—But thou—farewell, and win the praise
Of sages, by thy hearkening
With heed to this most certain thing.
Fear not because this tale I know,
For to my grey tower back I go
High raised above the heathy hills
Where the great erne the swift hare kills,
Or stoops upon the new-yeaned lamb;
There almost as a god I am
Unto few folk, who hear thy name
Indeed, but know nought of thy fame,
Nay, scarce if thou be man or beast."
So saying, back unto the feast
He turned, and went adown the hall,
Not heeding any gibe or call;
And left the palace and the town
With face turned toward his windy down.

Back to the hall, too, the King went,
With eyes upon the pavement bent
In pensive thought, delighting not
In riches and his kingly lot ;
But thinking how his days began
And of the lonely souls of man.

But time past, and midst this and that
The wise man's message he forgat ;
And as a king he lived his life,
And took to him a noble wife
Of the kings' daughters, rich and fair.
And they being wed for nigh a year,
And she now growing great with child,
It happed unto the forest wild
This king with many folk must ride
At ending of the summer-tide ;
There boar and hart they brought to bay,
And had right noble prize that day ;
But when the noon was now long past,
And the thick woods grew overcast,
They roused the mightiest hart of all.
Then loudly 'gan the King to call
Unto his huntsmen, not to leave
That mighty beast for dusk nor eve
Till they had won him ; with which word
His horn he blew, and forth he spurred,
Taking no thought of most or least.
But only of that royal beast.

And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night swallowing up the day
With blindness his swift course must stay.
Nor was there with him any one
So far his fair steed had outrun
The best of all his hunting-folk.

So, glancing at the stars that broke
'Twixt the thick branches here and there,
Backward he turned, and peered with care
Into the darkness, but saw nought,
Nor heard his folk, and therewith thought
His bed must be the brake leaves brown.
Then in a while he lighted down,
And felt about a little space,
If he might find a softer place ;
But as he groped from tree to tree
Some glimmering light he seemed to see
'Twixt the dark stems, and thither turned,
If yet perchance some wood-fire burned
Within a peasant's hut, where he
Might find, amidst their misery,
Rough food, or shelter at the least.

So, leading on his wearied beast,
Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
Till slowly grew that light to be
The thing he looked for, and he found
A hut on a cleared space of ground.
From whose half-opened door there streamed

The light that erst far off had gleamed.
Then of that shelter was he fain,
But just as he made shift to gain
The open space in front of it,
A shadow o'er the grass did flit,
And on the wretched threshold stood
A big man, with a bar of wood
In his right hand, who seemed as though
He got him ready for a blow ;
But ere he spoke the King cried, " Friend,
May God good hap upon thee send,
If thou wilt give me rest this night,
And food according to thy might."

" Nay," said the carle, " my wife lieth
In labour, and is nigh her death :
Nor canst thou enter here at all,
But nearby is my asses' stall,
Who on this night bide in the town ;
There, if thou wilt, mayst thou lie down.
And sleep until the dawn of day,
And I will bring thee what I may
Of food and drink."

Then said the King,
" Thanked be thou ; neither for nothing
Shalt thou this good deed do to me."

" Nay," said the carle, " let these things be,
Surely I think before the morn,
To be too weary and forlorn
For gold much heart in me to put."

With that he turned, and from the hut
Brought out a lantern, and rye-bread,
And wine, and showed the King a shed,
Strewed with a litter of dry brake :
Withal he muttered, for his sake,
Unto Our Lady some rude prayer,
And turned about and left him there.

So when the rye-bread, nowise fine,
The King had munched, and with green wine
Had quenched his thirst, his horse he tied
Unto a post, and there beside
He fell asleep upon the brake.

But in an hour did he awake,
Astonied with an unnamed fear,
For words were ringing in his ear
Like the last echo of a scream,
“*Take ! take !*” but of the vanished dream
No image was there left to him.
Then, trembling sore in every limb,
Did he arise, and drew his sword.
And passed forth on the forest sward.
And cautiously about he crept ;
But nought at all he heard, except
Some groaning of the woodman’s wife,
And forest sounds well known, but rife
With terror to the lonely soul.

Then he lay down again, to roll
His limbs within his huntsman’s cloak ;

And slept again, and once more woke
To tremble with that unknown fear,
And other echoing words to hear—
“ *Give up ! give up !* ” nor anything
Showed more why these strange words should ring
About him. Then he sat upright,
Bewildered, gazing through the night,
Until his weary eyes, grown dim,
Showed not the starlit tree-trunks slim
Against the black wood, grey and plain :
And into sleep he sank again,
And woke not soon : but sleeping dreamed
That he awoke, nor other seemed
The place he woke in but that shed,
And there beside his bracken bed
He seemed to see the ancient sage
Shrivelled yet more with untold age,
Who bending down his head to him
Said, with a mocking smile and grim, —
“ Take, or give up ; what matters it ?
This child new-born shall surely sit
Upon thy seat when thou art gone,
And dwelling ’twixt straight walls of stone.”

Again the King woke at that word
And sat up, panting and afeard,
And staring out into the night,
Where yet the woods thought not of light ;
And fain he was to cast off sleep,
Such visions from his eyes to keep.

Heavy his head grew none the less,
'Twixt 'wildering thoughts and weariness.
And soon he fell asleep once more,
Nor dreamed, nor woke again, before
The sun shone through the forest trees ;
And, shivering in the morning breeze,
He blinked with just-awakened eyes,
And pondering on those mysteries,
Unto the woodman's hovel went.

Him he found kneeling down, and bent
In moody grief above a bed,
Whereon his wife lay, stark and dead,
Whose soul near morn had passed away ;
And 'twixt the dead and living lay
A new-born man-child, fair and great.
So in the door the King did wait
To watch the man, who had no heed
Of this or that, so sore did bleed
The new-made wound within his heart.
But as the King gazed, for his part
He did but see his threatened foe,
And ever hard his heart did grow
With deadly hate and wilfulness :
And sight of that poor man's distress
Made it the harder, as of nought
But that unbroken line he thought
Of which he was the last : withal
His scornful troubled eyes did fall

Upon that nest of poverty,
Where nought of joy he seemed to see.

On straw the poor dead woman lay ;
The door alone let in the day,
Showing the trodden earthen floor,
A board on trestles weak and poor,
Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,
A half-glazed pipkin, nothing fair,
A bowl of porridge by the wife,
Untouched by lips that lacked for life,
A platter and a bowl of wood ;
And in the further corner stood
A bow cut from the wych-elm tree,
A holly club, and arrows three
Ill pointed, heavy, spliced with thread.

Ah ! soothly, well remembered
Was that unblissful wretched home,
Those four bare walls, in days to come,
And often in the coming years
He called to mind the pattering tears
That, on the rent old sackcloth cast
About the body, fell full fast,
'Twixt half-meant prayers and curses wild,
And that weak wailing of the child,
His threatened dreaded enemy,
The mighty king that was to be.

But as he gazed unsoftened there,
With hate begot of scorn and care,

Loudly he heard a great horn blow
And his own hunting call did know
And soon began the shouts to hear
Of his own people drawing near
Then lifting up his horn, he blew
A long shrill point, but as he threw
His head aback, beheld his folk,
Who from the close set thicket broke
And o'er the cleared space swiftly passed
With shouts that he was found at last.

Then turned the earl his dolour face,
And slowly rising in his place,
Drew thwart his eyes his fingers strong,
And on that gay-dressed glittering throng
Gazed stupidly, as still he heard
The name of King ; but said no word.

But his guest spoke, "Sirs, well be ye !
This luckless woodman, whom ye see,
Gave me good harbour through the night
And such poor victual as he might ;
Therefore shall he have more than gold
For his reward ; since dead and cold
His helpmate lies who last night died.
See now the youngling by her side :
Him will I take and rear him so
That he shall no more lie alow
In straw, or from the beech-tree dine.
But rather use white linen fine
And silver plate ; and with the sword

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING.

Shall learn to serve some King or Lord.
How say'st thou, good man ? ”

“ Sire,” he said
Weeping, but shamefaced, — “ Since here dead
She lies, that erst kept house for me,
E'en as thou wilt let it be ;
Though I had hoped to have a son
To help me get the day's work done.
And now, indeed, forth must he go
If unto manhood he should grow,
And lonely I must wander forth.
To whom east, west, and south, and north
Are all alike : forgive it me
If little thanks I give to thee
Who scarce can thank great God in heaven
For what is left of what was given.”

Small heed unto him the King gave,
But trembling in his haste to have
The body of his enemy,
Said to an old squire, “ Bring to me
The babe, and give the good man this
Wherewith to gain a little bliss,
In place of all his troubles gone,
Nor need he now be long alone.”

The carle's rough face, at clink of gold,
Lit up, though still did he behold
The wasted body lying there ;
But stooping, a rough box, foursquare
Made of old wood and lined with hay,

Wherein the helpless infant lay,
He raised, and gave it to the squire
Who on the floor cast down his lure,
Nor sooth dared murmur aught the while
But turning smiled a grim hard smile
To see the carle his pieres count
Still weeping: so did all men mount
And turning round into the wood
Forgot him and his drearilhood,
And soon were far off from the hut.

Then coming out, the door he shut
Behind him, and adown a glade,
Towards a rude hermitage he made
To fetch the priest unto his need,
To bury her and say her bede—
So when all things that he might do
Were done aright, heavy with woe,
He left the woodland hut behind
To take such chance as he might find
In other lands, forgetting all
That in that forest did befall.

But through the wild wood rode the King,
Moody and thinking on the thing,
And weighted yet by hovering fear;
Till now, when they had drawn anear
The open country, and could see
The road run on from close to lea,

And lastly by a wooden bridge
A long way from that heathy ridge
Cross over a deep lowland stream—
Then in his eyes there came a gleam,
And his hand fell upon his sword,
And turning round to squire and lord
He said, "Ride, sirs, the way is clear
Nor of my people have I fear,
Nor do my foes range over wide ;
And for myself fain would I ride
Right slowly homewards through the fields
Noting what this and that one yields ;
While by my squire who bears the child
Lightly my way shall be beguiled.
For some nurse now he needs must have
This tender life of his to save ;
And doubtless by the stream there is
Some house where he may dwell in bliss,
Till he grow old enough to learn
How gold and glory he may earn ;
And grow, perchance, to be a lord."

With downcast eyes he spoke that word ;
But forth they galloped speedily,
And he drew rein and stood to see
Their green coats lessening as they went.
This man unto the other bent,
Until mid dust and haze at last
Into a wavering mass they passed ;
Then 'twixt the hedgerows vanished quite

Just told of by the dust cloud white
Rolled upwards 'twixt the elm-trunks slim.

Then turned the King about to him
Who held the child, noting again
The thing wherein he first had lain,
And on one side of it could see
A lion painted hastily
In red upon a ground of white,
As though of old it had been dight
For some lord's rough-wrought palisade
But naked 'mid the hay was laid
The child, and had no mark or sign.

Then said the King, "My ancient line
Thou and thy sires through good and ill
Have served, and unto thee my will
Is law enough from day to day :
Ride nigh me hearkening what I say."

He shook his rein and side by side
Down through the meadows did they ride,
And opening all his heart, the King
Told to the old man everything
Both of the sage, and of his dream ;
Withal drawn nigh unto the stream,
He said, "Yet this shall never be
For surely as thou lovest me,
Adown this water shall he float
With this rough box for ark and boat,
Then if mine old line he must spill

There let God save him if He will,
While I in no case shed his blood."

"Yea," said the squire, "thy words are good,
For the whole sin shall lie on me,
Who greater things would do for thee
If need there were ; yet note, I pray,
It may be he will 'scape this day
And live ; and what wouldst thou do then
If thou shouldst meet him amongst men ?
I counsel thee to let him go
Since sure to nought thy will shall grow."

"Yea, yea," the King said, "let all be
That may be, if I once but see
This ark whirl in the eddies swift
Or tangled in the autumn drift
And wrong side up : " but with that word
Their horse-hoofs on the plank he heard,
And swift across the bridge he rode,
And nigh the end of it abode,
'Then turned to watch the old squire stop,
And leaning o'er the bridge-rail drop
The luckless child ; he heard withal
A muttered word and splashing fall
And from the wakened child a cry,
And saw the cradle hurrying by,
Whirled round and sinking, but as yet
Holding the child, nor overset.

Now somewhat, soothly at the sight
Did the King doubt if he outright

Had rid him of his feeble too,
But frowning did he turn to go
Unto his home, nor knew indeed
How better he might help his need.
And as unto his house he rode
Full little care for all he showed,
But bade stark Samuel the squire
Unto his bridle hand ride nigher,
And talk to him of careless things,
As unto such will talk great kings.

But when unto his palace gate
He came at last, thereby did wait
The chamberlain with eager eyes
Above his lips grown grave with lies
In haste to tell him that the queen,
While in the wild-wood he had been,
Had borne a daughter unto him
Strong, fair of face, and straight of limb.
So well at ease and glad thereat
His troubled dream he nigh forgot,
His troubled waking, and the ride
Unto the fateful river-side ;
Or thought of all as little things
Unmeet to trouble souls of kings.

So passed the days, so passed the years
In such-like hopes, and such-like fears,
And such-like deeds in field and hall
As unto royal men befall,

And fourteen years have passed away
Since on the huddled brake he lay
And dreamed that dream, remembered now
Once and again, when slow and slow
The minutes of some sleepless night
Crawl toward the dawning of the light.

Remembered not on this sweet morn
When to the ringing of the horn,
Jingle of bits and mingled shout
Toward that same stream he rideth out
To see his grey-winged falcons fly.

So long he rode he drew anigh
A mill upon the river's brim,
That seemed a goodly place to him,
For o'er the oily smooth millhead
There hung the apples growing red,
And many an ancient apple-tree
Within the orchard could he see,
While the smooth millwalls white and black
Shook to the great wheel's measured clack.
And grumble of the gear within;
While o'er the roof that dulled that din
The doves sat crooning half the day,
And round the half-cut stack of hay
The sparrows fluttered twittering.

There smiling stayed the joyous king,
And since the autumn noon was hot
Thought good anigh the pleasant spot

To dine that day, and therewith sent
To tell the miller his intent :
Who held the stirrup of the King,
Bareheaded, joyful at the thing,
While from his horse he lit adown.
'Then led him o'er an elm-beam brown,
New cut in February tide
'That crossed the stream from side to side,
So underneath the apple-trees
The King sat careless, well at ease
And ate and drank right merrily.

To whom the miller drew anigh
Among the courtiers, bringing there
Such as he could of country fare,
Green yellowing plums from off his wall,
Wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall
From off the wavering spire-like tree,
Junkets, and cream and fresh honey.

Smiling the King regarded him,
For he was round-paunched, short of limb,
Red-faced, with long, lank flaxen hair ;
But with him was a boy, right fair,
Grey-eyed, and yellow-haired, most like
Unto some Michael who doth strike
The dragon on a minster wall,
So sweet-eyed was he, and withal
So fearless of all things he seemed.
But when he saw him the King deemed
He scarce could be the miller's kin,

And laughing said, "Hast thou within
Thy dusty mill the dame who bore
This stripling in the days of yore,
For fain were I to see her now,
If she be liker him than thou?"

"Sire," said the miller, "that may be
And thou my dame shalt surely see ;
But for the stripling, neither I
Begat him, nor my wife did lie
In labour when the lad was born,
But as an outcast and forlorn
We found him fourteen years to-day,
So quick the time has worn away."

Then the King, hearkening what he said,
A vanished day remembered,
And troubled grew his face thereat ;
But while he thought of this and that
The man turned from him and was gone
And by him stood the lad alone ;
At whom he gazed, and as their eyes
Met, a great horror 'gan arise
Within his heart, and back he shrank
And shuddering a deep draught he drank,
Scarce knowing if his royal wine
He touched, or juice of some hedge-vine.

But as his eyes he lifted up
From off his jewelled golden cup,
Once more the miller drew anigh,

By whom his wife went timidly
Bearing some burden in her hand ;
So when before him she did stand
And he beheld her worn and old,
And black-haired, then that hair of gold,
Grey eyes, firm lips, and round cleft chin,
Brought stronger memory of his sin.

But the carle spake, " Dame, tell the King
How this befell, a little thing
The thoughts of such great folk to hold,
Speak out, and fear not to be bold."

" My tale," she said, " is short enow,
For this day fourteen years ago
Along this river-side I rode
From market to our poor abode,
Where dwelt we far from other men,
Since thinner was the country then
Than now it is ; so as I went
And wearied o'er my panniers bent,
From out the stream a feeble cry
I heard, and therewith presently,
From off my mule's back could I see
This boy who standeth here by thee,
A naked, new-born infant, laid
In a rough ark that had been stayed
By a thick tangled bed of weed ;
So pitying the youngling's need,
Dismounting, did I wade for him
Waist deep, whose ark now scarce did swim .

And he, with cold, and misery,
And hunger, was at point to die.

“Withal, I bare him to the mill
And cherished him, and had good will
To bring the babe up as mine own,
Since childless were we and alone,
And no one came to father it.
So oft have I rejoiced to sit
Beside the fire and watch him play.
And now, behold him!—but some day
I look to lose him, for, indeed,
I deem he comes of royal seed,
Unmeet for us: and now, my lord,
Hast thou heard every foolish word
About my son—this boy—whose name
Is Michael soothly, since he came
To us this day nigh Michaelmas.
—See, sire, the ark wherein he was!
Which I have kept.”

Therewith she drew
A cloth away; but the King knew,
Long ere she moved, what he should see.
Nor looked, but seeming carelessly
Leaned on the board and hid his eyes.
But at the last did he arise
And saw the painted lion red,
Not faded, well remembered;
Withal he thought, “And who of these
Were with me then amongst the trees

To see this box ;" but presently
He thought again that none but he
And the grey squire, old Samuel,
That painting could have noted well
Since Samuel his cloak had cast
About it, and therewith had past
Throughout the forest on that day,
And not till all were well away
Had drawn it off before the King,
But changed and downcast at the thing
He left the lovely autumn place,
Still haunted by the new-found face
Of his old foe, and back he rode
Unto his ancient rich abode
Forcing but dismal merriment
As midst his smiling lords he went ;
Who yet failed not to note his mood,
So changed : and some men of the wood
Remembered them, but said not aught.
Yea, trembled lest their hidden thought
Some bird should learn, and carry it.

The morrow come, the King did sit
Alone, to talk with Samuel,
Who yet lived, gathering wage for hell
He from the presence in a while
Came forth, and with his ugly smile
He muttered, " Well betide me, then,
St. Peter ! they are lucky men

Who serve no kings, since they indeed
May damn themselves each for his need.
And will not he outlive this day
Whom the deep water could not slay,
Ere yet his lips had tasted food?"
With that a horse, both strong and good.
He gat of the King's equerry,
And toward the mill rode speedily.

There Michael by the mill-tail lay,
Watching the swift stream snatch away
His float from midst the careless dace;
But thinking of the thin, dark face,
That yesterday all men he saw
Gaze at with seeming love and awe;
Nor had he, wondering at the lords,
Lost one word of the housewife's words;
And still he noted that the King
Beheld him as a wondrous thing,
Strange to find there: so in his heart
He thought to play some royal part
In this wild play of life, and made
Stories, wherein great words he said,
And did great deeds in desperate fight.
But midst these thoughts there came in sight
He who had carried him of yore,
From out the woodman's broken door,
Dressed like a king's man, with fine gold
Touching his hard brown hands and old,

So was his sleeve embroidered ;
A plumed hat had he on his head,
And by his side a cutting sword
Fit for the girdle of a lord ;
And round his neck a knite he bore,
The hilt whereof was figured o'er
With green leaves on a golden ground,
Whose stem a silver scroll enwound ;
(Charged with these letters, writ in black
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !

The boy gazed at him earnestly,
With beating heart, as he drew nigh.
And when at last he drew his rein
Beside him, thought that not in vain
His dream might be. But Samuel
Below his breath said ; " Surely well
Shalt thou fulfil thy destiny ;
And, spite of all, thou wilt not die
Till thou hast won the arched crown ? "

But with that word he lighted down,
And said aloud, " Lad, tell to me
Where the good miller I may see,
For from the King I come to-day,
And have a word of his to say ;
I think, indeed, concerning thee ;
For surely thou his lad must be."

Then Michael leapt up, nor took heed
Of how the nibbling dace might feed
Upon the loose ends of his bait ;

"Fair sir," he said, "my sire doth wait
Until men bring his mare from grass,
For to the good town will he pass,
Since he has need of household gear ;
Follow, my lord, the place is here."

Withal, the good steed being made fast,
Unto the other side they passed,
And by the door the miller found,
Who bowed before him to the ground,
And asked what he would have him do—
Then from his bosom Samuel drew
A scroll, and said, "Good friend, read here.
And do my bidding without fear
Of doing ill."

"Sir," said the man,
"But little lettered skill I can ;
Let my dame come, for she can read
Well-written letters at good need."

"Nay, friend," he said, "suffice it thee
'This seal at the scroll's end to see,
My Lord the King's ; and hear my word,
That I come hither from my lord
Thy foundling lad to have away
To serve the King from this same day.'

Downcast the miller looked thereat,
And twisting round his dusty hat,
Said, "Well, my lord, so must it be,
Nor is he aught akin to me,
Nor seems so : none the less would I

Have left him, when I came to die,
All things I have, with this my mill,
Wherein he hath no 'prentice skill,
Young as he is: and surely here
Might he have lived, with little fear,
A life of plenty and of bliss
Near by, too, a fair maid there is,
I looked should be good wife to him."

Meanwhile young Michael's head 'gan swim
With thoughts of noble life and praise;
And he forgot the happy days
Wherein the happy dreams he dreamed
That now so near fulfilment seemed;
And, looking through the open mill,
Stared at the grey and windy hill
And saw it not, but some fair place
Made strange with many a changing face,
And all his life that was to be.

But Samuel, laughing scornfully,
Said, "O good soul, thou thinkest then
This is a life for well-born men,
As deems our lord this youngling is—
Tell me, good lad, where lies thy bliss?"

But Michael turned shamefaced and red,
Waked from his dream, and stammering said,
"Fair sir, my life is sweet and good,
And John, the ranger of the wood,
Saith that I draw so good a bow.

That I shall have full skill enow
Ere many months have passed me by
To join the muster, and to try
To win the bag of florins white,
'That folk, on Barnaby the bright,
Shoot for within the market town.
Sir, please you to look up and down
The weedy reaches of our stream,
And note the bubbles of the bream,
And see the great chub take the fly,
And watch the long pike basking lie
Outside the shadow of the weed.
Withal there come unto our need
Woodcock and snipe when swallows go ;
And now the water-hen flies low
With feet that well-nigh touch the reeds,
And plovers cry about the meads,
And the stares chatter ; certes, sir,
It is a fair place all the year."

Eyeing him grimly, Samuel said,
"Thou show'st churl's breeding, by my head,
In foul despite of thy fair face !
Take heart, for to a better place
Thou goest now.—Miller, farewell,
Nor need'st thou to the neighbours tell
'The noble fortunes of the lad ;
For, certes, he shall not be glad
To know them in a year or twain.
Yet shall thy finding not be vain,

And thou mayst bless it : for behold
This bag wherein is store of gold ;
Take it and let thy hinds go play,
And grind no corn for many a day,
For it would buy thy mill and thee."

He turned to go, but pensively
Stood Michael, for his broken dream
Doubtful and far away did seem
Amidst the squire's rough mockeries ;
And tears were gathering in his eyes.
But the kind miller's rough farewell
Rang in his ears ; and Samuel
Stamped with his foot and plucked his sleeve ,
So therewithal he turned to leave
His old abode, the quiet place,
Trembling, with wet and tearful face.

But even as he turned there came
From out the house the simple dame
And cast rough arms about the lad,
Saying, " For that I have been glad
By means of thee this many a day,
My mourning heart this hour doth pay
But, fair son, may'st thou live in bliss,
And die in peace ; remembering this,
When thou art come to high estate,
That in our house, early and late,
The happy house that shall be sad,
Thou hadst the best of all we had
And love unfeigned from us twain,

Whose hearts thou madest young again,
Hearts that the quicker old shall grow
Now thou art gone."

"Good dame, enow,"

Quoth Samuel, "the day grows late,
And sure the King for meat shall wait
Until he see this new-found lord."
He strode away upon that word;
And half ashamed, and half afeard,
Yet eager as his dream he neared,
Shyly the lad went after him.
They crossed the stream and by its brim
Both mounted the great warhorse grey,
And without word they rode away.

But as along the river's edge
They went, and brown birds in the sedge
Twittered their sweet and formless tune
In the fair autumn afternoon,
And reach by reach the well-known stream
They passed, again the hopeful dream
Of one too young to think death near,
Who scarce had learned the name of fear
Remorseful memories put to flight;
Lovely the whole world showed and bright
Nor did the harsh voice rouse again
The thought of mockery or of pain,
For other thoughts held Samuel.
So, riding silently and well,

They reached at last the dusty road
That led unto the King's abode.
But Samuel turned away his face
Therefrom, and at a steady pace
The great horse thundered o'er the bridge,
And made on toward the heathy ridge,
Wherefrom they rode that other day.
But Michael, noting well the way,
Why thus they went, fell wondering,
And said aloud, "Dwells then the King,
Fair sir, as now within the wood?"

"Young fool, where that it seems him good
He dwelleth," quoth old Samuel,
"And now it pleaseth him to dwell
With the black monks across the wood."

Withal he muttered in his hood,
"Curst be the King, and thee also,
Who thrust me out such deeds to do,
When I should bide at home to pray,
Who draw so nigh my ending day."
So saying forth his horse he spurred
And to himself said yet this word,
"Yea, yea, and of all days forlorn
God curse the day when I was born."

Therewith he groaned ; yet saying thus
His case seemed hard and piteous,
When he remembered how of old
Another tale he might have told.

So as each thought his own thoughts still,

The horse began to breast the hill,
And still they went on higher ground,
Until as Michael turned him round
He saw the sunny country-side
Spread out before him far and wide,
Golden amidst its waning green,
Joyous with varied life unseen.
Meanwhile from side to side of them
The trees began their way to hem,
As still he gazed from tree to tree,
And when he turned back presently
He saw before him like a wall
Uncounted tree-trunks dim and tall.
Then with their melancholy sound
The odorous spruce-woods met around
Those wayfarers, and when he turned
Once more, far off the sunlight burned
In star-like spots, while from o'erhead,
Dim twilight through the boughs was shed.

Not there as yet had Michael been,
Nor had he left the meadows green
Dotted about with spreading trees,
And fresh with sun and rain and breeze,
For those mirk woods, and now his eyes
Gazed round about for mysteries.
Since many an old wife's tale he knew ;
Huge woodcutters in raiment blue.
The remnant of a mighty race.
The ancient masters of the place,

And hammering trolls he looked to see,
And dancers of the faërie,
Who, as the ancient stories told,
In front were lovely to behold,
But empty shells seen from behind.

So on they rode until the wind
Had died out, stifled by the trees,
And Michael 'mid those images
Of strange things made alive by fear,
Grew drowsy in the forest drear ;
Nor noted how the time went past
Until they nigh had reached at last
The borders of the spruce-tree wood ;
And with a tingling of the blood
Samuel bethought him of the day
When turned about the other way
He carried him he rode with now.
For the firs ended on the brow
Of a rough gravelly hill, and there
Lay a small valley nowise fair
Beneath them, clear at first of all
But brake, till amid rushes tall
Down in the bottom alders grew
Crabbed and rough ; and winding through
The clayey mounds a brook there was
Oozy and foul, half choked with grass.

There now the Squire awhile drew rein,
And noted how the ground again

Rose up upon the other side,
And saw a green glade opening wide
"Twixt oaks and hollies, and he knew
Full well what place it led unto,
Withal he heard the bittern's boom,
And though without the fir-wood's gloom
They now were come, yet red and low
The sun above the trees did show,
And in despite of hardihead,
The old squire had a mortal dread
Of lying in the wood alone
When that was done that should be done.

Now Michael, wakened by the wind,
Clutched tighter at the belt behind,
And with wide eyes was staring round,
When Samuel said, "Get to the ground,
My horse shall e'en sink deep enow,
Without thy body, in this slough;
And haste thee, or we both shall lie
Beneath the trees, and be as dry
As autumn dew can make us. Haste!
The time is short for thee to waste."

Then from the horse the boy did glide.
And slowly down the valley side
They went, and Michael, wakened now,
Sang such rude songs as he might know.
Grown fresh and joyous of his life;
While Samuel, clutching at the knife
About his neck that hung, again

Down in the bottom tightened rein,
And turning, in a hoarse voice spake,
"My girths are loosening, come and take
The straps and draw them tighter, lad "

Then Michael stayed his carol glad,
And noting little in his mirth
The other's voice, unto the girth
Without a word straight set his hand :
But as with bent head he did stand,
Straining to tighten what was tight,
In Samuel's hand the steel flashed bright
And fell, deep smitten in his side,
Then, leaping back, the poor lad cried,
As if for help, and staggering fell,
With wide eyes fixed on Samuel ;
Who none the less grown deadly pale,
Lit down, lest that should not avail
To slay him, and beside him knelt,
And since his eyes were closed now, felt
His heart that beat yet ; therewithal
His hand upon the knife did fall.
But, ere his fingers clutched it well,
Far off he seemed to hear a bell,
And trembling knelt upright again,
And listening, listened not in vain,
For clear he heard a tinkling sound.
Then to his horse from off the ground
He leapt, nor reasoned with his dread
But thought the angel of the dead

Was drawing nigh the slayer to slay,
Ere scarce the soul had passed away.
One dreadful moment yet he heard
That bell, then like a madman spurred
His noble horse ; that maddened too,
The close-set fir-wood galloped through,
Not stayed by any stock or stone,
Until the furious race being done,
Anigh the bridge he fell down dead ;
And Samuel, mazed with guilt and dread,
Wandered afoot throughout the night,
But came, at dawning of the light,
Half-dead unto the palace gate.

There till the opening did he wait ;
Then, by the King's own signet-ring,
He gained the chamber of the King,
And painfully what he had done
He told, and how the thing had gone.
And said withal : " Yet is he dead,
And surely that which made my dread
Shall give thee joy : for doubt not aught
That bell the angels to him brought,
That he in Abraham's breast might lie —
So ends, O King, the prophecy."

Nathless the King scowled, ill content,
And said, " I deemed that I had sent
A man of war to do my will,
Who lacked for neither force nor skill,
And thou com'st with a woman's face,

Bewildered with thy desperate race,
And made an idiot with thy fear,
Nor bring'st me any token here!"

Therewith he rose and gat away,
But brooding on it through that day,
Thought that all things went not so ill
As first he deemed, and that he still
Might leave his old line flourishing.
Therewith both gold and many a thing
Unto old Samuel he gave,
But failed thereby his life to save :
Who, not so old in years as sin,
Died ere the winter, and within
The mirster choir was laid asleep,
With carven saints his head to keep.

And so the days and years went by,
And still in great felicity
The King dwelt, wanting only this—
A son wherewith to share his bliss,
And reign when he was dead and gone
Nor had he daughter, save that one
Born on the night when Michael first,
Forlorn, alone, and doubly cursed,
Felt on him this world's bitter air.

This daughter, midst fair maids most fair,
Was not yet wed, though at this time.
Being come unto her maiden's prime,
She looked upon her eighteenth May

Midst this her mother passed away.
Not much lamented of the King,
Who had the thought of marrying
Some dame more fertile, and who sent
A wily man with this intent
To spy the countries out and find
Some great king's daughter, wise and kind,
And fresh, and fair, in face and limb,
In all things a fit mate for him.

So in short time it came to pass
Again the King well wedded was,
And hoped once more to have a son.

And when this fair dame he had won.
A year in peace he dwelt with her,
Until the time was drawing near
When first his eyes beheld that foe
Dead as he deemed these years ago.
Now at that time, as custom was,
His daughter was about to pass
Unto a distant house of his,
Built by some king for worldly bliss
In ancient days : there, far removed
From courts or towns, his dame beloved
The dead king had been wont to see
Play mid the summer greenery,
Or like Erigone of old
Stand in the vineyards girt with gold,
To queen it o'er the vintagers,
Half worshipping that face of hers.

Long years ago these folk were passed,
Their crimes forgotten, or else cast
Into the glowing crucible
Of time, that tempers all things well,
That maketh pleasure out of pain,
And out of ruin golden gain ;
Nathless, unshaken still, there stood
The towers and ramparts red as blood ;
Wherein their lives had passed away ;
And still the lovely gardens lay
About them, changed, but smiling still,
As in past time, on good or ill.

Thither the Princess Cecily
Must go awhile in peace to be ;
For now, midst care, and doubt, and toil,
Proud words drawn back, and half-healed broil,
The King had found one meet to wed
His daughter, of great goodlihead,
Wealth, and unbroken royalty.
And now he said to her, when she
Was setting out for that fair place,
“ O daughter, thou shalt see my face
Before a month is fully gone,
Nor wilt thou see me then alone ;
For that man shall be with me then,
Whom I have chosen from all men
To hold the treasure of my life.
Full sore he longs to see his wife,
Nor needst thou fear him for thy part.

Who holdeth many a woman's heart
As the net holds the silvery fish.
Farewell and all that thou mayst wish
I pray God grant thee."

Therewithal

He kissed her, and from out the hall
She passed, not shamefaced, or afraid
Of what might happen ; though, indeed,
Her heart of no man's heart had need
To make her happy as she thought.

Ever the new sun daily brought
Fresh joy of life to her bedside,
The world before her open wide
Was spread, a place for joy and bliss.
Her lips had trembled with no kiss,
Wherewith love slayeth fear and shame ;
Her grey eyes conscious of no blame,
Beheld unmoved the eyes of men ;
Her hearing grew no dimmer when
Some unused footstep she might hear ;
And unto no man was she dear,
But as some goddess might have been
When Greek men worshipped many a queen

Now with her armed folk forth she rode
Unto that ancient fair abode,
And while the lark sung o'er the corn,
Love gilded not the waning morn ;

And when the sun rose high above,
High thoughts she thought, but not of love ;
And when that sun the world did leave,
He left no love to light the eve.
The moon no melancholy brought,
The dawn no vain, remorseful thought
But all untroubled her sweet face
Passed 'neath the gate of that old place
And there her bridegroom she abode.

But scarce was she upon the road
Ere news unto the King was brought
That Peter, the old Abbot, sought
To see him, having newly come
From the wild place that was his home
Across the forest ; so the King
Bade him to enter, well willing
To hear what he might have to say ;
Who, entering the great hall straightway,
Had with him an old, reverend man,
The Sub-prior, father Adrian,
And five monks more, and therewithal
Ten of his folk, stout men and tall,
Who bore armed staves and coats of fence
So, when he came to audience,
He prayed the King of this or that,
Whereof my tale-teller forgot,
And graciously the King heard all,
And said at last, " Well, what may fall,

Thou go'st not hence, fair lord, to day,
Unless in vain a king must pray,
Thou and thy monks shall eat with me;
While feast thine axe-men merrily."

Withal, he eyed the Abbot's folk
In careless mood, then once more spoke,
"Tall men thou feedest, by the road!"
Lord Abbot, come they from the wood—
Dwell many more such thereabout?
Fain were I such should swell the shout
When I am armed, and rank meets rank."

But as he spoke his loud voice sank
Wavering, nor heard he aught at all
Of the faint noises of the hall,
Or what the monk in answer said
For, looking from a steel-clad head,
Those eyes again did he behold,
That erst from 'neath the locks of gold
Kindly and bold, but soft with awe,
Beneath the apple-boughs he saw.

But when thereof he surely knew
Pale to the very lips he grew.
Till gathering heart within a while
With the faint semblance of a smile
He seemed to note the Abbot's words
That he heard not; then from the lords
He turned, and facing Michael said,
"Raise up the steel cap from thine head,
That I may see if thou look'st bold;

Methinks, I know thy face of old.
Whence com'st thou?"

Michael lifted straight
From off his brow the steel cap's weight,
And showed the bright locks curling round
His fresh and ruddy face, sun-browned,
And in a voice clear as a bell,
'Told all his story, till he tell
Sore wounded in that dismal vale,
And said withal, "My lord, the tale
Of what came after, none knoweth
Better than he, who, from ill death
Saved me that tide, and made me man,
My lord, the sub-prior Adrian."

"Speak on then, father," quoth the King,
Making as he was hearkening.

"My lord," said Adrian, "I, who then
Was but a server of poor men,
Outside our Abbey walls, one day
Was called by one in poor array,
A charcoal-burner's lad, who said
That soon his father would be dead,
And that of all things he would have
His rights, that he his soul might save.
I made no tarrying at that word,
But took between mine hands the Lord,
And bade the boy bear forth the bell.
For though few folk there were to tell
Who passed that way, nathless, I trow

The beasts were glad that news to know.

“ Well, by the pinewood's skirts we went
While through its twilight the bell sent
A heavenly tinkling ; but the lad
'Gan telling me of fears he had
Of elves who dwell within the wood.
I chid him thereat, as was good,
Bidding him note Whom in mine hands
I held, 'The Ransom of all Lands.
But as the firwood's dim twilight
Waxed into day, and fair and bright
The evening sun showed through the trees,
Our ears fanned by the evening breeze,
The galloping of horse-hoofs heard,
Wherewith my page hung back afraid
Of elves and such-like ; but I said,
' Wilt thou thy father should be dead
Ere we can reach him ? Oh my son,
Fear not that aught can stay 'This One.'

“ 'Therewith I smote my mule, and he
Ran forward with me hastily
As fearing to be left behind.
Well, as we went, what should we find
Down by the stream, but this my son,
Who seemed as though his days were done ;
For in his side a knife there stood
Wherefrom ran out a stream of blood,
Soaking the grass and water-mint ;
Then, I dismounting, we by dint

Of all our strength, the poor youth laid
Upon my mule, and down a glade
Of oaks and hollies then we passed,
And reached the woodman's home at last ;
A poor hut, built of wattled wood,
And by its crooked gable stood
A ruinous shed, unroofed and old,
That beasts of burden once did hold.
-- 'Thyself, my lord, mayst know it well,
Since thereabout the wild swine dwell ,
And hart, and hind, and roe are there
So the lad's wounds I staunch'd with care
Forthwith, and then the man I shrived,
Who none the less got well and lived
For many a day : then back I went
And the next day our leech I sent
With drugs to tend upon the lad.
Who soon was as he ne'er had had
A hurt at all : and he being well
We took him in our house to dwell,
And taught him letters, and, indeed,
Before long, Latin could he read
As well as I ; but hath no will
To turn unto religion still.
Yet is he good and doth no wrong ;
And being thereto both hale and strong,
My lord, the Abbot, sayeth of him,
' He shall serve God with heart and limb,
Not heart and voice.' Therefore, my lor

'Thou seest him armed with spear and sword
For their defence who feed him still,
'Teach him, and guard his soul from ill.
Ho, Michael! hast thou there with thee
The fair-wrought knife I first did see
Deep in thy side? there, show it now
Unto the King, that he may know
Our tale is not a thing of nought."

Withal the King, with eyes distraught,
Amidst his anxious face and pale,
Sat leaning forward through this tale,
Scarce noting here and there a word.
But all being told, at last he heard
His own voice changed, and harsh, and low,
That said, "Fair lord, I fain would know,
Since this your man-at-arms seems true,
What thing will he be worth to you ;
For better had he wear my rose
Than loiter in your Abbey-close,
Poring o'er books no man can read."

"O sire!" the monk said, "if thy need
Be great of such men, let him go ;
My men-at-arms need make no show
Of fairness, nor should ladies miss,
E'en as thou say'st, such men as this."

Laughing he spoke ; the King the while,
His pale face puckering to a smile ;
Then, as in some confused dream,
In Michael's hand he saw the gleam

Of that same steel remembered well,
The gift he gave to Samuel,
Drawn from his father's ancient chest
To do that morn his own behest.
And as he now beheld its sheen,
The twining stem of gold and green,
The white scroll with the letter black,
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !
He hardened yet his heart once more,
And grown unhappy as before,
When last he had that face in sight,
Now for the third time come to light,
Once more was treacherous, fierce, and fell.

Now was the Abbot feasted well
With all his folk, then went away,
But Michael clad in rich array
Became the King's man, and was thought
By all most happy to be brought
Unto such hopeful fair estate.

For ten days yet the King did wait,
Which past, for Michael did he send,
And he being come, said to him, " Friend,
Take now this letter from my hand
And go unto our southern land ;
My captain Hugh shall go with thee
For one day's journey, then shall he
Tell thee which way thou hast to ride ;
The third day thence about noontide

If thou dost well, thou shouldst be close
Unto my Castle of the Rose
Where dwells my daughter ; needs it is
That no man living should see this
Until that thou within my wall
Hast given it to the seneschal ;
Be wise and wary then, that thou
Mayst think of this that happeneth now
As birthday to thine high estate."

So said he, knowing not that fate
Was dealing otherwise than he.

But Michael going, presently
Met Hugh, a big man rough and black,
And who of nought but words had lack,
With him he mounted, and set forth
And daylong rode on from the north.

Now if the King had hope that Hugh
Some deed like Samuel's might do
I know not, certes nought he said
To that hard heart and narrow head,
Who knew no wiles but wiles of war,
And was as true as such men are ;
Yet had there been a tale to tell
If Michael had not held him well,
And backward still the wrath had turned
Wherewith his heart not seldom burned
At scornful words his fellow said.

At last they reached cross-ways that led
One west, one southward still, wherear

Hugh, taking off his feathered hat,
Bowed low in scorn, and said, "Fair sir,
Unto the westward need I go,
While you go southward, seem to get,
I doubt not, an earl's consort,
Farewell, my lord, and yet beware
Thou dost not at my lady stare
Too hard, lest thou shouldst plume the moat,
Or have a halter round thy throat."

But Michael to his scoff and naught,
But upon high things set his thought
As his departing hooves he heard.
And still betwixt the hedgerows spurred
And when the twilight was o'erpast
At a small inn drew rein at last,
And slept that night as such folk can,
And while next morn the thrushes ran
Their first course through the autumn dew
The gossamers did he dash through.
And on his way rode steadily
The live-long day, nor yet was he
Alone, as well might be that day
Since a fair town was in his way,
Stout hinds he passed, and yeomen good,
And friars of the heavy hood,
And white-coifed housewives mounted high
Above their maunds, while merrily
The well-shod damsel trudged along
Beside them, sending forth a song

As little taught as is a bird's ;
And good men, good wives, priests, and herds,
And merry maids failed not to send
Good wishes for his journey's end
Athwart him as still on he sped,
Free from all evil thoughts or dread.

Withal again the day went by,
And in that city's hostelry
He slept, and by the dawn of day
Next morn again was on his way,
And leaving the scarce wakened street
The newly risen sun did greet
With cheerful heart. His way wound on
Still up and up till he had won
Up to a great hill's chalky brow.
Whence looking back he saw below
The town spread out, church, square, and street.
And baily, crawling up the feet
Of the long yew-besprinkled hill ;
And in the fragrant air and still,
Seeming to gain new life from it,
The doves from roof to roof did flit :
The early fires sent up their smoke
That seemed to him to tell of folk
New wakened unto great delight :
For he upon that morning bright,
So joyous felt, so free from pain,
He seemed as he were born again

Into some new immortal state
That knew no envy, fear, or hate.

Now the road turned to his left hand
And led him through a table-land,
Windy and barren of all grain ;
But where a hollow specked the plain
The yew-trees hugged the sides of it,
And mid them did the woodlark flit
Or sang well sheltered from the wind
And all about the sheep did find
Sweet grass, the while the shepherd's song
Rang clear as Michael sped along.

Long time he rode, till suddenly,
When now the sun was broad and high,
From out a hollow where the yew
Still guarded patches of the dew,
He rode and saw that he had won
That highland's edge, and gazed upon
A valley that beneath the haze
Of that most fair of autumn days,
Showed glorious ; fair with golden sheaves
Rich with the darkened autumn-leaves,
Gay with the water-meadows green,
The bright blue streams that lay between.
The miles of beauty stretched away
From that bleak hill-side bare and grey.
Till white cliffs over slopes of vine,
Drew 'gainst the sky a broken line.
And 'twixt the vineyards and the stream

Michael saw gilded spirelets gleam :
For, hedged with many a flowery close,
There lay the Castle of the Rose,
His hurried journey's aim and end.

Then downward he began to wend,
And 'twixt the flowery hedges sweet
He heard the hook smite down the wheat,
And murmur of the unseen folk ;
But when he reached the stream that broke
The golden plain, but leisurely
He passed the bridge, for he could see
The masters of that ripening realm,
Cast down beneath an ancient elm
Upon a little strip of grass,
From hand to hand the pitcher pass,
While on the turf beside them lay
The ashen-handled sickles grey,
The matters of their cheer between :
Slices of white cheese, specked with green,
And greenstriped onions and ryebread,
And summer apples faintly red,
Even beneath the crimson skin ;
And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,
Plucked from the cottage gable-end.

And certes Michael felt their friend
Hearing their voices, nor forgot
His boyhood and the pleasant spot

Beside the well remembered stream,
And friendly did this water seem
As through its white-flowered weeds it ran
Bearing good things to beast and man.

Yea, as the parapet he passed,
And they a greeting toward him cast,
Once more he felt a boy again;
As though beneath the harvest wain
He was asleep, by that old stream,
And all these things were but a dream —
The King, the Squire, the hurrying ride
Unto the lonely quagmire side;
The sudden pain, the deadly swoon,
The feverish life from noon to noon:
The tending of the kind old man,
The black and white Dominican,
The hour before the Abbot's throne.
The poring o'er old books alone,
In summer morns; the King again,
The envious greetings of strange men
This mighty horse and rich array,
This journey on an unknown way.

Surely he thought to wake from it.
And once more by the waggon sit,
Blinking upon the sunny mill.

But not for either good or ill
Shall he see one of all those days;
On through the quivering noontide haze
He rode, and now on either hand

Heavy with fruit the trees did stand ;
Nor had he ridden long, ere he
The red towers of the house could see
Grey on the wind-beat southern side :
And soon the gates thrown open wide
He saw, the long fixed drawbridge down,
The moat, with lilies overgrown,
Midst which the gold-scaled fishes lay :
Such peace was there for many a day.

And deep within the archway's shade
The warler on his cloak was laid,
Dozing, one hand upon a harp.
And nigh him a great golden carp
Lay stiff with all his troubles done,
Drawn from the moat ere yet the sun
Was high, and nigh him was his bane,
An angling rod of Indian cane.

Now hearing Michael's horse-hooves smite
The causeway, shading from the light
His eyes, as one scarce yet awake,
He made a shift his spear to take,
And, eyeing Michael's badge the while,
Rose up, and with a lazy smile,
Said, " Ho ! fair sir, abide, abide,
And show why hitherward ye ride
Unto my lady's royal home."
Said Michael, " From the King I come,
As by my badge ye well may see ;
And letters have I here with me

To give my lord the Seneschal."

"Yea," said the man, "but in the hall
He feasteth now; what haste is there.
Certes full quickly cometh care;
And sure I am he will not read
Thy letters, or to aught give heed
Till he has played out all the play,
And every guest has gone away;
So thou, O damoiseau, must wait;
Tie up thine horse anigh the gate,
And sit with me, and thou shalt hear
The Kaiser lieth on his bier.

Thou laughest—hast thou never heard
Of this same valorous Red Beard,
And how he died? Well, I can sing
Of many another dainty thing,
Thou wilt not a long while forget,
The budget is not empty yet.
—Peter! I think thou mockest me,
But thou art young and fair perdie,
I wish thee luck—well, thou mayest go
And feel the afternoon wind blow
Within Dame Bertha's pleasance here;
She who was held so lief and dear,
All this was built but for her sake,
Who made the hearts of men to ache;
And dying full of years and shame
Yet left an unforgotten name—
God rest her soul!"

Michael the while
 Harkened his talking with a smite,
 Then said, "O friend, I think to hear
 Both '*The King lieth on his bier*'
 And many another song of thee,
 Ere I depart ; but now show me
 The pleasance of the ancient queen,
 For these red towers above the green
 Seem like the gates of Paradise,
 'That surely somewhere through them lies."

Then said the warder, "That may be
 If thou know'st what may come to thee—
 When past the drawbridge thou hast gone,
 Upon the left three steps of stone
 Lead to a path beneath the wall
 Of the great court, that folk now call
 The falconer's path, nor canst thou miss
 Going thereby, to find the bliss
 Thou look'st for, since the path ends there,
 And through a wicket gilded fair
 The garden lies where thou wouldst be :
 Nor will I fail to come to thee
 Whene'er my Lord the Seneschal
 Shall pass well fed from out the hall."

Then Michael, thanking him, passed on,
 And soon the gilded wicket won,
 And went into that pleasance sweet,
 And wandered there with wary feet
 And open mouth, as though he deemed

That in some lovely dream he dreamed,
And feared to wake to common day,
So fair was all ; and e'en decay
Brought there but pensive loveliness,
Where autumn those old walls did bless
With wealth of fruit, and through the grass
Unscared the spring-born thrush did pass.
Who yet knew nought of winter-tide.

So wandering, to a fountain's side
He came, and o'er the basin hung,
Watching the fishes, as he sung
Some song remembered from of old,
Ere yet the miller won that gold.
But soon made drowsy with his ride,
And the warm hazy autumn-tide,
And many a musical sweet sound,
He cast him down upon the ground,
And watched the glittering water leap,
Still singing low, nor thought to sleep.

But scarce three minutes had gone by
Before, as if in mockery,
The starling chattered o'er his head,
And nothing he remembered,
Nor dreamed of aught that he had seen

Meanwhile unto that garden green
Had come the Princess, and with her
A maiden that she held right dear,
Who knew the inmost of her mind.

Those twain, as the warm scented wind
Played with their raiment or their hair,
Had late been running here and there,
Chasing each other merrily,
As maids do, thinking no one by ;
But now, well wearied therewithal,
Had let their gathered garments fall
About their feet, and slowly went :
And through the leaves a murmur sent,
As of two happy doves that sing
The soft returning of the spring.

But of the two the Princess spoke
The less, but into laughter broke
Not seldom, and would redden oft,
As on her lips her fingers soft
She laid, as still the other maid,
Half grave, half smiling, follies said.

So in their walk they drew anigh
That fountain in the midst, whereby
Lay Michael sleeping, dreaming nought
Of such fair things so nigh him brought ;
They, when the fountain shaft was past,
Beheld him on the ground down-cast,
And stopped at first, until the maid
Stepped lightly forward to the shade,
And when she had gazed there awhile
Came running back again, a smile
Parting her lips, and her bright eyes
Afire with many fantasies ;

And ere the Lady Cecily
Could speak a word, "Hush! hush!" said she
"Did I not say that he would come
'To woo thee in thy peaceful home
Before thy father brought him here?
Come, and behold him, have no fear'
'The great bell would not wake him now,
Right in his ears."

"Nay, what dost thou?"

The Princess said; "Let us go hence;
Thou know'st I give obedience
To what my father bids; but I
A maid full fain would live and die,
Since I am born to be a queen."

"Yea, yea, for such as thou hast seen,
That may be well," the other said.
"But come now, come; for by my head
This one must be from Paradise;
Come swiftly then, if thou art wise
Ere aught can snatch him back again."

She caught her hand, and not in vain
She prayed; for now some kindly thought
To Cecily's brow fair colour brought,
And quickly 'gan her heart to beat
As love drew near those eyes to greet,
Who knew him not till that sweet hour.

So over the fair, pink-edged flower,
Softly she stepped; but when she came

Anigh the sleeper, lovely shame
Cast a soft mist before her eyes
Full filled of many fantasies.
But when she saw him lying there
She smiled to see her mate so fair :
And in her heart did Love begin
To tell his tale, nor thought she sin
To gaze on him that was her own,
Not doubting he was come alone
To woo her, whom midst arms and gold
She deemed she should at first behold ;
And with that thought love grew again
Until departing was a pain,
Though fear grew with that growing love,
And with her lingering footsteps strove
As from the place she turned to go,
Sighing and murmuring words but low.
But as her raiment's hem she raised,
And for her merry fellow gazed
Shamefaced and changed, she met her eyes
Turned grave and sad with ill surprise ;
Who while the Princess mazed did stand
Had drawn from Michael's loosened band
The King's scroll, which she held out now
To Cecily, and whispered low,
" Read, and do quickly what thou wilt,
Sad, sad ! such fair life to be spilt :
Come further first."

With that they stepped

A pace or two from where he slept.
And then she read,

" Lord Seneschal,

*On thee and thine may all good fall,
Greeting hereby the King sendeth,
And biddeth thee to put to death
His enemy who beareth this;
And as thou lovest life and bliss,
And all thy goods thou holdest dear.
Set thou his head upon a spear
A good half furlong from the gate.
Our coming hither ward to wait -
So perish the King's enemies !"*

She read, and scarcely had her eyes
Seen clear her father's name and seal,
Ere all love's power her heart did feel,
That drew her back in spite of shame,
To him who was not e'en a name
To her a little hour ago.

Panting she said, " Wait thou alone
Beside him, watch him carefully
And let him sleep if none draw nigh
If of himself he waketh, then
Hide him until I come again,
When thou hast told him of the snare
If thou betrayest me beware !
For death shall be the least of all
The ills that on thine head shall fall - -
What say I, thou art dear to me,

And doubly dear now shalt thou be,
Thou shalt have power and majesty,
And be more queen in all than I —
Few words are best, be wise, be wise !”

Withal she turned about her eyes
Once more, and swiftly as a man
Betwixt the garden trees she ran,
Until, her own bower reached at last,
She made good haste, and quickly passed
Unto her secret treasury.

There, hurrying since the time was nigh
For folk to come from meat, she took
From 'twixt the leaves of a great book
A royal scroll, signed, sealed, but blank,
Then, with a hand that never shrank
Or trembled, she the scroll did fill
With these words, writ with clerkly skill, -

*“ Unto the Seneschal, Sir Rafe,
Who holdeth our fair castle safe,
Greeting and health ! O well-beloved,
Know that at this time we are moved
To wed our daughter, so we send
Him who bears this, our perfect friend,
To be her bridegroom ; so do thou
Ask nought of him, since well we know
His race and great nobility,
And how he is most fit to be
Our son ; therefore make no delay,*

*But wed the twain upon the day
Thou readest this : and see that all
Take oath to him, what'e'er shall fall
To do his bidding as our heir ;
So doing still be lief and dear
As I have held thee yet to be."*

She cast the pen down hastily
At that last letter, for she heard
How even now the people stirred
Within the hall : nor dared she think
What bitter potion she must drink
If now she failed, so falsely bold
That life or death did she enfold
Within its cover, making shift
To seal it with her father's gift,
A signet of cornelian.

Then swiftly down the stairs she ran
And reached the garden ; but her tears
Brought shouts and thunder to her ears,
That were but lazy words of men
Full-fed, far off ; nay, even when
Her limbs caught up her flying gown
The noise seemed loud enough to drown
The twitter of the autumn birds,
And her own muttered breathless words
That to her heart seemed loud indeed.

Yet therewithal she made good speed
And reached the fountain seen of none

Where yet abode her friend alone,
Watching the sleeper, who just now
Turned in his sleep and muttered low.
Therewith fair Agnes saying nought
From out her hand the letter caught ;
And while she leaned against the stone
Stole up to Michael's side alone,
And with a cool, unshrinking hand
Thrust the new scroll deep in his band,
And turned about unto her friend ;
Who having come unto the end
Of all her courage, trembled there
With face upturned for fresher air,
And parted lips grown grey and pale,
And limbs that now began to fail,
And hands wherefrom all strength had gone,
Scarce fresher than the blue-veined stone
That quivering still she strove to clutch.

But when she felt her lady's touch,
Feebly she said, " Go ! let me die
And end this sudden misery
That in such wise has wrapped my life,
I am too weak for such a strife,
So sick I am with shame and fear ;
Would thou hadst never brought me here ! "

But Agnes took her hand and said,
" Nay, queen, and must we three be dead
Because thou fearest ? all is safe
If boldly thou wilt face Sir Rafe. "

So saying, did she draw her hence,
Past tree and bower, and high pleached fence
Unto the garden's further end,
And left her there and back did wend.
And from the house made haste to get
A gilded maund wherein she set
A flask of ancient island wine,
Ripe fruits and wheaten manchet's fine,
And many such a delicate
As goddesses in old time ate,
Ere Helen was a Trojan queen ,
So passing through the garden green
She cast her eager eyes again
Upon the spot where he had lain,
But found it empty, so sped on
Till she at last the place had won
Where Cecily lay faint, weak and white
Within that fair bower of delight.

Her straight she made to eat and drink,
And said, " See now thou dost not shrink
From this thy deed ; let love slay fear
Now, when thy life shall grow so dear,
Each minute should seem loss to thee
If thou for thy felicity
Couldst stay to count them ; for I say,
'This day shall be thy happy day."

Therewith she smiled to see the wine
'Embraced by her fair fingers fine ;
And her sweet face grow bright again

With sudden pleasure after pain.

Again she spoke, "What is this word
That dreaming, I perchance, have heard,
But certainly remember well ;
That some old soothsayer did tell
Strange things unto my lord, the King,
That on thy hand the spousal ring
No Kaiser's son, no King should set,
But one a peasant did beget—
What sayst thou?"

But the Queen flushed red ;

"Such fables I have heard," she said ;

"And thou—is it a scathe to me,
The bride of such a man to be?"

"Nay," said she, "God will have him King ;
How shall we do a better thing
With this or that one than He can ;
God's friend must be a goodly man."

But with that word she heard the sound
Of folk who through the mazes wound
Bearing the message ; then she said,
"Be strong, pluck up thine hardihead,
Speak little, so shall all be well,
For now our own tale will they tell."

And even as she spoke they came
And all the green place was aflame
With golden raiment of the lords ;
While Cecily, noting not their words,

Rose up to go ; and for her part
By this had fate so steeled her heart,
Scarce otherwise she seemed, than when
She passed before the eyes of men
At tourney or high festival.
But when they now had reached the hall,
And up its very steps they went,
Her head a little down she bent ;
Nor raised it till the dais was gained
For fear that love some monster feigned
To be a god, and she should be
Smit by her own bolt wretchedly.
But at the rustling, crowded dais
She gathered heart her eyes to raise,
And there beheld her love, indeed,
Clad in her father's serving weed,
But proud, and flushed, and calm withal.
Fearless of aught that might befall.
Nor too astonished, for he thought, --
" From point to point my life is brought
Through wonders till it comes to this ;
And trouble cometh after bliss,
And I will bear all as I may,
And ever as day passeth day,
My life will hammer from the twain,
Forging a long enduring chain."

But midst these thoughts their young eyes met
And every word did he forget
Wherewith men name unhappiness

As read again those words did bless
With double blessings his glad ears.
And if she trembled with her fears,
And if with doubt, and love, and shame,
The rosy colour went and came
' In her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow,
Little did folk think of it now,
But as of maiden modesty,
Shamefaced to see the bridegroom nigh.

And now when Rafe the Seneschal
Had read the message down the hall,
And turned to her, quite calm again,
Her face had grown, and with no pain
She raised her serious eyes to his
Grown soft and pensive with his bliss,
And said,

“Prince, thou art welcome here,
Where all my father loves is dear,
And full trust do I put in thee,
For that so great nobility
He knoweth in thee ; be as kind
As I would be to thee, and find
A happy life from day to day,
Till all our days are past away.”

What more than found the bystanders
He found within this speech of hers,
I know not ; some faint quivering
In the last words ; some little thing
That checked the cold words' even flow.

But yet they set his heart aglow.

And he in turn said eagerly :

“Surely I count it nought to die
For him who brought me unto this ;
For thee, who givest me this bliss ;
Yea, even dost me such a grace
To look with kind eyes in my face,
And send sweet music to my ears.”

But at his words she, mazed with tears,
Seemed faint, and failing quickly, when
Above the low hum of the men
Uprose the sweet bells' sudden clang,
As men unto the chapel rang ,
While just outside the singing folk
Into most heavenly carols broke.
And going softly up the hall
Boys bore aloft the verges tall
Before the Bishop's gold-clad head.

Then forth his bride young Michael led,
And nought to him seemed good or bad
Except the lovely hand he had ;
But she the while was murmuring low,
“If he could know, if he could know,
What love, what love, his love should be !”

But while mid mirth and minstrelsy
The ancient Castle of the Rose
Such pageant to the autumn shows
The King sits ill at ease at home,

For in these days the tidings come
That he who in his line should wed,
Lies in his own town stark and dead,
Slain in a tumult of the street.

Brooding on this he deemed it meet,
Since nigh the day was come, when she
Her bridegroom's visage looked to see.
To hold the settled day with her.
And bid her at the least to wear
Dull mourning guise for gold and white.
So on another morning bright,
When the whole promised month was past.
He drew anigh the place at last
Where Michael's dead head, looking down
Upon the highway with a frown,
He doubted not at last to see.
So 'twixt the fruitful greenery
He rode, scarce touched by care the while,
Humming a roundel with a smile.

Withal, ere yet he drew anigh,
He heard their watch-horn sound from high,
Nor wondered, for their wont was so,
And well his banner they might know
Amidst the stubble lands afar :
But now a distant point of war
He seemed to hear, and bade draw rein,
But listening cried, " Push on again !
They do but send forth minstrelsy
Because my daughter thinks to see

The man who lieth on his bier."
So on they passed, till sharp and clear
They heard the pipe and shrill life sound ;
And restlessly the King glanced round
To see what he had striven for,
The crushing of that Sage's lore,
The last confusion of that fate.

But drawn still nigher to the gate
They turned a sharp bend of the road,
And saw the pageant that abode
The solemn coming of the King.

For first on each side, maids did sing,
Dressed in gold raiment ; then there came
The minstrels in their coats of flame ;
And then the many-coloured lords,
The knights' spears, and the swordmen's swords
Backed by the glittering wood of bills.

So now, presaging many ills,
The King drew rein, yet none the less
He shrank not from his hardness,
But thought, " Well, at the worst I die.
And yet perchance long life may lie
Before me—I will hold my peace ;
The dumb man's borders still increase."

But as he strengthened thus his heart
He saw the crowd before him part,
And down the long melodious lane,
Hand locked in hand there passed the twain,

As fair as any earth has found,
Clad as kings' children are, and crowned.
Behind them went the chiefest lords,
And two old knights with sheathed swords
The banners of the kingdom bore.

But now the King had pondered sore,
By when they reached him, though, indeed,
The time was short unto his need,
Betwixt his heart's first startled pang
And those old banner-bearers' clang
Anigh his saddle-bow : but he
Across their heads scowled heavily,
Not saying aught awhile : at last,
Ere any glance at them he cast,
He said, " Whence come ye ? what are ye ?
What play is this ye play to me ? "

None answered,—Cecily, faint and white.
The rather Michael's hand clutched tight,
And seemed to speak, but not one word
The nearest to her could have heard.
Then the King spoke again,—“ Sir Rafe,
Meseems this youngling came here safe
A week ago ? ”

“ Yea, sir,” he said ;
“ Therefore the twain I straight did wed,
E'en as thy letters bound me to.”
“ And thus thou diddest well to do,”
The King said. “ Tell me on what day
Her maiden life she put away.”

“Sire, the eleventh day this is
Since that they gained their earthly bliss :”
Quoth old Sir Rafe. The King said nought
But with his head bowed down in thought,
Stood a long while ; but at the last
Upward a smiling face he cast,
And cried aloud above the folk,
“Shout for the joining of the yoke
Betwixt these twain ! And thou, fair lord,
Who dost so well my every word,
Nor makest doubt of anything,
Wear thou the collar of thy King ;
And a duke’s banner, cut foursquare,
Henceforth shall men before thee bear
In tourney and in stricken field.

“But this mine heir shall bear my shield.
Carry my banner, wear my crown,
Ride equal with me through my town.
Sit on the same step of the throne ;
In nothing will I reign alone ;
Nor be ye with him discontent
For that with little ornament
Of gold and folk to you he came ;
For he is of an ancient name
That needeth not the clink of gold —
The ancientest the world doth hold ;
For in the fertile Asian land,
Where great Damascus now doth stand,
Ages ago his line was born,

Ere yet men knew the gift of corn ,
And there, anigh to Paradise,
His ancestors grew stout and wise :
And certes he from Asia bore
No little of their piercing lore.

“ Look then to have great happiness,
For every wrong shall he redress.”

Then did the people's shouting drown
His clatter as he leapt adown ;
And taking in each hand a hand
Of the two lovers, now did stand
Betwixt them on the flower-strewn way,
And to himself meanwhile 'gan say,—

“ How many an hour might I have been
Right merry in the gardens green ;
How many a glorious day had I
Made happy with some victory ;
What noble deeds I might have done,
What bright renown my deeds have won ;
What blessings would have made me glad ;
What little burdens had I had ;
What calmness in the hope of praise ;
What joy of well-accomplished days,
If I had let these things alone ;
Nor sought to sit upon my throne
Like God between the cherubim.
But now—but now, my days wax dim,

And all this fairness have I tost
Unto the winds, and all have lost
For nought, for nought ! yet will I strive
My little end of life to live ;
Nor will I look behind me more,
Nor forward to the doubtful shore."

With that he made the sign to turn,
And straight the autumn air *did* burn
With many a point of steel and gold ;
And through the trees the carol rolled
Once more, until the autumn thrush
Far off 'gan twittering on his bush,
Made mindful of the long-lived spring.

So mid sweet song and tabouring,
And shouts amid the apple-grove,
And soft caressing of his love,
Began the new King Michael's reign
Nor will the poor folk see again
A king like him on any throne,
Or such good deeds to all men done :
For then, as saith the chronicle.
It was the time, as all men tell,
When scarce a man would stop to gaze
At gold crowns hung above the ways.

HE ended; and midst those who heard were some
 Who, midst his tale, half dreamed they were
 at home,

Round the great fire upon the winter night ;
 And, with the memory of the fresh delight
 Wherewith they first had heard that story told,
 Forgetting not they were grown weak and old,
 Yet felt as if they had at least grown grey
 Within the land left for so many a day.
 He, with the gestures they were wont to see,
 So told his tale, so strange with eld was he,
 Just so he stammered, and in just such wise
 He sighed, beginning fresh, as their young eyes,
 Their ears, in happy days passed long ago,
 Had ever noted other old men do,
 When they, full filled with their quick-coming joys,
 Would gaze on old folk as on carven toys.

But he being silent, silently awhile
 They mused on these things, masking with a smile
 The vain regrets that in their hearts arose,
 The while with eager talk the young folk chose
 The parts that pleased them ; but their elder hosts
 Falling to talk, yet noted well the ghosts
 Of old desires within their wasted eyes,
 Till one by one the fresh-stirred memories,
 So bitter-sweet, flickered and died away ;
 And as old men may do, whose hopes grew grey
 Before their beards, they made a little mirth
 Until the great moon rose upon the earth.

APRIL.

O FAIR midspring, besung so oft and oft.
How can I praise thy loveliness enow ?
Thy sun that burns not, and thy breezes soft
That o'er the blossoms of the orchard blow,
The thousand things that 'neath the young leaves grow,
The hopes and chances of the growing year,
Winter forgotten long, and summer near.

When Summer brings the lily and the rose,
She brings us fear ; her very death she brings
Hid in her anxious heart, the forge of woes ;
And, dull with fear, no more the mavis sings.
But thou ! thou diest not, but thy fresh life clings
About the fainting autumn's sweet decay,
When in the earth the hopeful seed they lay.

Ah ! life of all the year, why yet do I
Amid thy snowy blossoms' fragrant drift,
Still long for that which never draweth nigh,
Striving my pleasure from my pain to sift,
Some weight from off my fluttering mirth to lift ?
—Now, when far bells are ringing, “ Come again,
Come back, past years ! why will ye pass in vain ? ”

AND now the watery April sun lit up
Upon the fair board golden ewer and cup,
And over the bright silken tapestry
The fresh young boughs were gladdening every eye,
And round the board old faces you might see
Amidst the blossoms and their greenery.

So when the flutes were silent, and the birds,
Rejoicing in their flood of unknown words,
Were heard again, a silken-fastened book
A certain elder from his raiment took,
And said, "O friends, few words are best to-day.
And no new thing I bring you ; yet ye may
Be pleased to hear an ancient tale again,
'That, told so long ago, doth yet remain
Fresh e'en 'mongst us, far from the Argive land :
Which tale this book, writ wholly by mine hand,
Holds gathered up as I have heard it told.

" Surely I fear me, midst the ancient gold
Base metal ye will light on here and there,
Though I have noted everything with care,
And with good will have set down nothing new
Nor holds the land another book for you
That has the tale in full with nought beside,
So unto me let your good word betide ;
Though, take it as ye may, no small delight
I had, herein this well-loved tale to write."

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

ARGUMENT.

ACRISIUS, king of Argos, being warned by an oracle that the son of his daughter Danaë should slay him, shut her up in a brazen tower built for that end beside the sea : there, though no man could come nigh her, she nevertheless bore a son to Jove, and she and her new-born son, set adrift on the sea, came to the island of Seriphos. Thence her son, grown to manhood, set out to win the Gorgon's Head, and accomplished that end by the help of Minerva ; and afterwards rescued Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, from a terrible doom, and wedded her. Coming back to Seriphos he took his mother thence, and made for Argos, but by stress of weather came to Thessaly, and there, at Larissa, accomplished the prophecy, by unwittingly slaying Acrisius. In the end he founded the city of Mycenæ, and died there.

NOW of the King Acrisius shall ye hear,
Who, thinking he could free his life from fear,
Did that which brought but death on him at last.

In Argos did he reign in days long past,
And had one daughter, fair as man could see,
Called in the ancient stories Danaë ;
But as her fairness day by day grew more,
Unto his ears came wandering words of lore,
Which bade him wot that either soon or late

He should be taken in the toils of fate,
And by the fruit of his own daughter's womb
Be slain at last, and set within his tomb ;
And therefore heavy sorrow on him fell,
That she whom he was bound to love so well
Must henceforth be his deadliest dread and woe.

Long time he pondered what were best to do ;
And whiles he thought that he would send her forth
To wed some king far in the snowy north,
And whiles that by great gifts of goods and gold
Some lying prophet might be bought and sold
To swear his daughter he must sacrifice,
If he would yet find favour in the eyes
Of the dread gods who govern everything ;
And sometimes seemed it better to the King,
That he might 'scape the shedding of her blood
By leaving her in some far lonely wood,
Wherein the Dryads might the maiden find,
Or beasts might slay her, following but their kind.

So passed his anxious days, until at last,
When many a plot through his vexed brain had passed,
He lacked the heart his flesh and blood to slay,
Yet neither would he she should go away
From out his sight, or be at large at all ;
Therefore his wisest craftsmen did he call,
And bade them make for him a tower foursquare,
Such as no man had yet seen anywhere,
For therein neither stone or timber was,
But all was fashioned of mere molten brass.

Now thither oft would maiden Danaë stray,
And watch its strange walls growing day by day,
Because, poor soul ! she knew not anything
Of these forebodings of the fearful King,
Nor how he meted out for her this doom,
Therein to dwell as in a living tomb.
But on a day, she, coming there alone,
Found it all finished and the workmen gone,
And no one nigh, so through the open door
She entered, and went up from floor to floor,
And through its chambers wandered without dread ;
And, entering one, she found therein a bed,
Dight daintily, as though to serve a queen ;
And all the walls adorned with hangings green,
Tables and benches in good order set,
And all things new, by no one used as yet.

With that she murmured, " When again I see
My father, will I bid him tell to me
Who shall live here and die here, for, no doubt.
Whoever enters here shall ne'er go out :
Therefore the walls are made so high and great,
Therefore the bolts are measureless of weight,
The windows small, barred, turned unto the sea,
That none from land may tell who here may be.
No doubt some man the King my father fears
Above all other, here shall pass his years.
Alas, poor soul ! scarce shall he see the sun,
Or care to know when the hot day is done,
Or ever see sweet flowers again, or grass,

Or take much note of how the seasons pass.
Truly we folk who dwell in rest and ease
But lightly think of such abodes as these ;
And I, who live wrapped round about with bliss.
Shall go from hence and soon forget all this .
For in my garden many a sweet flower blooms,
Wide open are the doors of all my rooms,
And lightly folk come in and lightly go ;
And I have known as yet but childish woe."

Therewith she turned about to leave the place.
But as unto the door she set her face
A bitter wailing from outside she heard,
And somewhat therewithal she waxed afeard,
And stopped awhile ; yet listening, she but thought
" This is the man who to his doom is brought
By weeping friends, who come to see the last
Of that dear face they know shall soon be past
From them for ever." Then she 'gan to go
Adown the brazen stairs with footsteps slow.

But quick the shrieks and wailing drew ancor.
Till in her ears it sounded sharp and clear,
And then she said, " Alas ! and must I see
These weeping faces drawn with agony ?
Would I had not come here to-day !" Withal
She started, as upon her ear did fall
The sound of shutting of the outer door,
And people coming up from floor to floor ;
And paler then she grew, but moved to meet
The woful sounds and slow-ascending feet.

Shrinking with pity for that wretched one
Whose life of joy upon that day was done.

Thus down the stairs with saddened heart she passed
And to a lower chamber came at last ;
But as she went beneath the archway wide
The door was opened from the other side,
And in poured many maidens, whom she knew
For her own fair companions, leal and true ;
And after them two men-at-arms there came,
With knitted brows and eyes downcast for shame.

But when those damsels saw her standing there,
Anew they wept, and tore their unbound hair ;
But midst their wailing, still no word they said,
Until she spoke oppressed with sickening dread :

“ O tell me what has happened to me then !
For is my father slain of outland men ?
Or have the gods sent death upon the land ?
Or is it mine own death that they command ?
Alas, alas ! but slay me quick, I pray,
Nor let me linger on from day to day,
Maddened with fear like this, that sickens me,
And makes me seem the half-dead thing ye see.”

Then, like a man constrained, a soldier said
These cruel words unto the wretched maid :
“ Lady, lose hope and fear now once for all ;
Here must thou dwell betwixt brass wall and wall
Until the gods send gentle death to thee ;
And these as erst thine handmaidens shall be .
And if thou askest why the thing is so,

Thus the King wills it, for a while ago
An oracle foretold that thou shouldst live
To have a son, who bitter death should give
Unto thy father ; so, to save this shame
From falling on the glorious Argive name,
He deemed it well that thou shouldst live indeed,
But yet apart from man thy life shouldst lead.
So in this place thy days must pass away,
And we who are thy guards, from day to day
Will bring thee everything that thou mayst need.
But pardon us, constrained to do this deed
By the King's will, and oaths that we have sworn
Ere to this life of sorrow thou wert born."

Therewith they turned and went, and soon the sound
Of shutting doors smote like a deadly wound
Into her heart ; and yet no word she spoke,
But fell as one beneath a deadly stroke.

Then they who there her fellows were to be
Bore up her body, groaning heavily,
Unto the chamber whither fate had led
Her feet that morn ; and there upon the bed
They laid her body, and then sat around,
With heavy heads and hair that swept the ground,
To weep the passing of those happy days
When many an one their happy lot would praise.
But now and then, when bitterly would sting
The loss of some nigh-reached and longed-for thing,
Into a wail their weeping would arise.

Then in a while did Danaë ope her eyes,
And to her aching forehead raised her hand ;
But when she saw that wan, dishevelled band,
She soon remembered this was no ill dream,
But that all things were e'en as they did seem.
Then she arose, but soon upon the bed
Sank down again, and hid her troubled head,
And moaned and moaned, and when a dæmsel came
And touched her hand, and called her by her name
She knew her not, but turned her head away :
Nor did she know when dark night followed day.

So passed by many a day in mourning sore,
And weariness oppressed her evermore
In that unhappy prison-house of brass ;
And yet a little the first sting did pass
That smote her, and she ate and drank and slept,
And fair and bright her body Venus kept,
Yea, such a grace the sea-born goddess fair
Did to her, that the ripples of her hair
Grew brighter, and the colour in her face
And lovely lips waned not in that sad place ;
And daily grew her limbs in goodlihead ;
Till as she lay upon the golden bed,
You would have thought the Queen herself had come
To meet some love far from her golden home.

And once it happed at the first hour of day
In golden morn upon her bed she lay,
Newly awakened to her daily woe,

And heard the rough sea beat the rocks below,
The wheeling sea-gull screaming on the wing,
Sea-swallows swift, and many a happy thing,
Till bitterly the tears ran down her cheek,
And stretching forth her arms and fingers weak,
'Twixt moans these piteous helpless words she said :—
“ O Queen Diana, make me now thy maid,
And take me from this place and set me down
By the boar-haunted hills, that oak-woods crown,
Amid thy crowd of trim-girt maidens fair.

“ And shall I not be safe from men-folk there,
Thou cruel King, when she is guarding me,
The mighty maid from whom the shepherds flee,
When in the gathering dusk 'twixt day and night,
The dead leaves tell them of her footsteps light,
Because they mind how dear Actæon bought
The lovely sight for which he never sought,
Diana naked in the water wan.

“ Yea, what fear should I have of any man
When through the woods I, wandering merrily,
With girt-up gown, sharp sword upon the thigh,
Full quiver on the back, stout bow in hand,
Should tread with firm feet many a grassy land,
And grow strong-limbed in following up the deer,
And meet the lions' eyes with little fear?

“ Alas ! no doubt she hears not ; many a maid
She has already, of no beast afraid,
Crisp-haired, with arms made meet for archery,
Whose limbs unclad no man shall ever see ;

Though the birds see them, and the seeding grass
Harsh and unloving over them may pass,
When carelessly through rough and smooth they run,
And bough and briar catches many an one.

“Alas ! why on these free maids is my thought,
When to such misery my life is brought ?
I, who so long a happy maid have been,
The daughter of a great King and a Queen ;
And why these fresh things do I think upon,
Who now shall see but little of the sun ?

“Here every day shall have the same sad tale,
My weary damsels with their faces pale,
The dashing of the sea on this black rock,
The piping wind through cranny and through lock,
The sea-bird’s cry, like mine grown hoarse and shrill,
The far-off sound of horn upon the hill,
The merry tune about the shepherd’s home,
And all the things whereto I ne’er may come.

“O ye who rule below, I pray this boon,
I may not live here long, but perish soon,
Forgotten, but at peace, and feeling nought ;
For even now it comes across my thought
That here my wretched body dwells alone,
And that my soul with all my hope is gone.

“Father, thy blood upon thine own head be
If any solace Venus send to me
Within this wretched place which thou hast made.
Of thine own flesh and blood too much afraid.”

Truly Diana heard not, for that tide
Upon the green grass by a river side,
Wherein she had just bathed her body sweet,
She stooped to tie the sandals to her feet,
Her linen gown upon the herbage lay,
And round her was there standing many a may
Making her ready for the morning chase.

But so it happed that Venus by the place
Was passing, just arisen from the sea,
And heard the maid complaining bitterly,
So to the window-bars she drew anigh,
And thence unseen, she saw the maiden lie,
As on the grass herself she might have lain
When in the thicket lay Adonis slain ;
For power and joy she smiled thereat, and thought
"She shall not suffer all this pain for nought."
And slowly for Olympus sailed away,
And thither came at hottest of the day.

Then through the heavenly courts she went, and when
She found the father both of gods and men,
She smiled upon him, and said, "Knowest thou
What deeds are wrought by men in Argos now?
Wherein a brazen tower well builded is,
That hides a maid away from all my bliss ;
Since thereby thinks Acrisius to forego,
This doom that has been fated long ago,
That by his daughter's son he shall be slain ;
Wherefore he puts the damsel to this pain
To see no man, and thinks to 'scape his doom

If she but live and die with barren womb ;
And great dishonour is it unto me
That such a maiden lives so wretchedly ;
And great dishonour is it to us all
That ill upon a guiltless head should fall
To save a King from what we have decreed.
Now, therefore, tell me, shall his impious deed
Save him alive, while she that might have borne
Great kings and glorious heroes, lives forlorn
Of love's delight, in solitude and woe ? ”

Then said the Thunderer, “ Daughter, nowise so
Shall this be in the end ; heed what shall fall,
And let none think that any brazen wall
Can let the gods from doing what shall be.”

Now therewithal went Venus to the sea
Glad of her father's words, and, as she went,
Unseen the gladness of the spring she sent
Across the happy lands o'er which she moved,
Until all men felt joyous and beloved.

But while to Paphos carelessly she fared.
All day upon the tower the hot sun glared,
And Danaë within that narrow space
Went to and fro, and sometimes hid her face
Between her hands, moaning in her despair,
Or sometimes tore the fillets from her hair,
And sometimes would begin a piteous tale
Unto her maids, and in the midst would fail

For sobs and tears ; but mostly would she sit
Over against the window, watching it,
And feel the light wind blowing from the sea
Against her face, with hands laid listlessly
Together in her lap ; so passed the day,
And to their sleep her damsels went away,
And through the dead of night she slept awhile,
But when the dawn came, woke up with a smile,
As though she had forgotten all her pain,
But soon the heavy burden felt again,
And lay a wretch unhappy. till the sun
Drew nigh the sea's lip, and the night was done.

In that fresh morn was no one stirring yet,
And many a man his troubles did forget
Buried in sleep, but nothing she forgot,
She raised herself and up in bed she sat,
And towards the window turned round wearily
To watch the changing colours of the sky ;
And many a time she sighed, and seemed as though
She would have told the story of her woe
To whatsoever god near by might be
Betwixt the grey sky and the cold grey sea,
But to her lips no sound at all would rise,
Except those oft-repeated heavy sighs.

And yet, indeed, within a little while
Her face grew calm, the shadow of a smile
Stole o'er her parted lips and sweet grey eyes,
And slowly from the bed did she arise,
And towards the window drew, and yet did seem,

Although her eyes were open, still to dream.

There on the sill she laid her slender hand,
And looking seaward, pensive did she stand,
And seemed as though she waited for the sun
To bring her news that evil days were done;
At last he came and cast his golden road
Over the green sea toward that lone abode,
And into Danaë's face his glory came
And lit her softly waving hair like flame.
But in his light she held out both her hands,
As though he brought her from some far-off lands
Healing for all her great distress and woe.

But yellower now the sunbeams seemed to grow
Not whiter as their wont is, and she heard
A tinkling sound that made her, half afeard,
Draw back a little from the fresh green sea,
Then to a clang the noise rose suddenly,
And gently was she smitten on the breast,
And some bright thing within her palm did rest,
And trickled down her shoulder and her side,
And on her limbs a little did abide,
Or lay upon her feet a little while.

Then in her face increased the doubtful smile,
While o'er her eyes a drowsy film there came,
And in her cheeks a flush as if of shame,
And, looking round about, could she behold
The chamber scattered o'er with shining gold,
That grew, till ankle-deep she stood in it.

Then through her limbs a tremor did there flit

As through white water runs the summer wind,
And many a wild hope came into her mind,
But her knees bent and soft she sank down there,
And on the gold was spread her golden hair,
And like an ivory image still she lay,
Until the night again had hidden day.

But when again she lifted up her head,
She found herself laid soft within her bed,
While midmost of the room the taper shone,
And all her damsels from the place were gone,
And by her head a gold-robed man there stood,
At sight of whom the damsel's shamefast blood
Made all her face red to the golden hair,
And quick she covered up her bosom fair.

Then in a great voice said he, "Danaë,
Sweet child, be glad, and have no fear of me
And have no shame, nor hide from thy new love
The breast that on this day has pillowed Jove.
Come now, come from that balmy nest of thine,
And stand with me beneath the taper's shine
That I may see thy beauty once again ;
Then never shalt thou be in any pain,
But if thou liftest up thy face to Jove
I shall be kind to my sweet simple love ;
I shall bethink me of thy body sweet,
From golden head to fair and dainty feet."
Then, trembling sore, from out the bed she came

And hid away her face for dread and shame,
But soon she trembled more for very love,
To feel the loving hands of mighty Jove
Draw down her hands, and kisses on the head
And tender bosom, as again he said,
“Now must I go ; and sweet love, Danaë,
Fear nothing more that man can do to thee,
For soon shall come an ending to thy woe,
And thou shalt have a son whose name shall grow
Still greater, till the mountains melt away
And men no more can tell the night from day.”

Then forth he sprang and o'er the sea did fly
And loud it thundered from a cloudless sky.

SO when her damsels came to her next morn,
And thought to see her laid alow forlorn
Upon the bed, and looking out to sea
Moaning full oft, and sighing heavily,
They found her singing o'er a web of silk
Where through the even warp as white as milk
Quick flew the shuttle from her arm of snow,
And somewhat from her girded gown did show
On the black treadles both her rosy feet,
Moving a little as the tender wheat

Moves in the June when Zephyr blows on it,
So, like a goddess weaving did she sit.

But when she saw her maidens wondering stand
She ceased her song and spake and stayed her hand,
"If now ye see me merry of my mood
Be nought amazed, for e'en as die the good
So die ill days ; and now my heart is light,
For harken ; a fair dream I had last night,
'That in his claws an eagle lifted me
And bore me to a land across the sea :
Wherefore I think that here I shall not die
But live to feel dew falling from the sky,
And set my feet deep in the meadow grass
And underneath the scented pine-trees pass,
Or in the garden feel the western breeze,
The herald of the rain, sweep through the trees,
Or in the hottest of the summer day,
Betwixt green banks within the mill-stream play.

"For either shall my father soon relent,
Or for my sake some marvel shall be sent,
And either way these doors shall open wide ;
And then doubt not to see me soon a bride
With some king's amorous son before my feet.

"Ah ! verily my life shall then be sweet ;
Before these days I knew not life or death,
With little hope or fear I drew my breath,
But now when all this sorrow is o'erpast,
Then shall I feel how sweet life is at last,
And learn how dear is peace from all these fears.

“So no more will I waste my life in tears,
But pass the time as swiftly as may be,
Until ye step out on the turf with me.”

Then glad they were, when such-like words they
 heard,
And yet some doubted and were sore afraid
That she had grown light-headed with her woe,
Dreading the time might come when she would throw
Her body on the ground and perish there,
Slain by her own hand mighty with despair.
Nathless the days more merrily went by
And from that prison men heard minstrelsy,
When nought but mourning, fisher-folk afraid
Who passed that way, in other times had heard.

Yet truly Danaë said that all things pass
And are forgotten ; in that house of brass
Forgotten was the stunning bitter pain
Wherewith she entered it, and yet again
In no long time, hope was forgotten too
When wringing torments moaning from her drew,
And to and fro the pale scared damsels went,
And those her guards unto Acrisius sent.

But ere the messenger returned again
She had been eased of half her bitterest pain,
And on her breast a fair man-child was laid ;
Then round the messenger her maids afraid
Drew weeping ; but he charged them earnestly,

Ever to watch her in that chamber high,
Lest any man should steal the babe away,
And so to bide until there came a day
When on her feet she might arise and go,
Whereof by messengers the King must know ;
So, threatening torments unendurable,
If any harm through treachery befell,
He left them, and no more to them he told,
But in his face the sooth they might behold.

Now, therefore when some wretched days were past,
And trembling by the bed she stood at last,
She heard the opening of the outer door,
And footsteps came again from floor to floor, .
And soon with all-armed men her chamber shone,
Who with few words now led her forth alone
Adown the stairs from out the brazen place ;
And on her hot hands, and her tear-stained face
Half-fainting, the pine-scented air she felt,
And all about the salt sea savour smelt,
And in her ears the dashing of the sea
Rang ever ; thus the God had set her free.

But by the shore further they led her still
To where the sea beat on a barren hill,
And a long stage of timber met the sea,
At end whereof was tossing fearfully
A little boat that had no oars or sail,
Or aught that could the mariner avail.
Thither with her their steps the soldiers bent,
And as along the narrow way they went

The salt waves leapt aloft to kiss her feet
And in the wind streamed out her tresses sweet ;
But little heed she took of feet or head
For nought she doubted she to death was led,
But ever did she hold against her breast
The little babe, and spoke not for the rest,
No, not when in the boat they bade her go,
And 'twixt its bulwarks thin she lay alow,
Nor when adrift they set her presently
And all about was but the angry sea.

No word she said until the sun was down,
And she beheld the moon that on no town,
On no fair homestead, no green pasture shone,
But lit up the unwearied sea alone ;
No word she said till she was far from shore
And on her breast the babe was wailing sore,
And then she lifted up her face to Jove,
And said, " O thou who once didst call me love,
Hast thou forgotten those fair words of thine,
When underneath the taper's glimmering shine
Thou bad'st me stand that thou mightst look on me
And love thou call'dst me, and sweet Danaë ?
Now on thy promised help to-day I call,
For on what day can greater woe befall
Than this wherein to-night my body is,
And brought thereto, O King, by thy sweet kiss ? "

But neither did she pray the God in vain ;
For straight he set himself to end her pain,

And while he cast on her a gentle sleep,
The winds within their houses did he keep
Except the west which soft on her did blow,
That swiftly through the sea the boat might go.

Far out to sea a certain isle doth lie
Men call Seriphos, craggy, steep, and high :
It rises up on every side but one,
And mariners its ill-famed headlands shun ;
But toward the south the meads slope soft adown,
Until they meet the yellow sands and brown,
'That slope themselves so gently to the sea,
The nymphs are hidden only to the knee
When half a mile of rippling water is
Between the waves that their white limbs do kiss
And the last wave that washes shells ashore.

To this fair place the west wind onward bore
The skiff that carried Danaë and her son,
And on the morn, when scarce the dusk was done,
Upon the sands the shallop ran aground ;
And still they slept, and for awhile around
Their wretched bed the waves sang lullaby,
But sank at last and left the long strand dry.

'Then uprose Danaë, and nothing knew
What land it was : about her sea-fowl flew ;
Behind her back the yet retreating sea
Beat on the yellow sands unceasingly ;
Landward she saw the low green meadows lie,
Dotted with homesteads, rich with elm-trees high ;

And at her feet the little boat there lay
That happily had brought her on the way.

But as it happed, the brother of the King
Had ridden forth to hear the sea-fowl sing,
With hawk on fist, right early on that morn,
Hard by the place whereunto she was borne.
He, seeing far away a white thing stand,
Deemed her at first some maiden of the sand,
Such as to fishers sings a lioned strain,
And leave them longing for their love in vain.
So, wishful to behold the sea-folk's bride,
He set the spurs into his horse's side.
But drawing nigher, he but saw her there,
Not moving much, her unbound yellow hair
Heavy with dew and washing of the sea ;
And her wet raiment clinging amorously
About her body, in the wind's despite ;
And in her arms her woe and her delight,
Spreading abroad the small hands helplessly
That on some day should still the battle's cry.
And furthermore he saw where by her side
Yet lay her ferry o'er the waters wide :
Then, though he knew not whence she might have
come,
He doubted not the firm land was her home.

But when he came anigh, beholding him
She fell a trembling in her every limb,
And kneeling to him held the young babe out,

And said : " O Sir, if, as I have no doubt,
In this strange land thou art a king and lord,
Speak unto me some comfortable word.

" Born of a king who rules a lovely land,
I in my house that by the sea doth stand,
With all my girls, made merry on a day :
Now some of them upon the sands did play,
Dancing unto their fellows' minstrelsy ;
And some it pleased upon sweet flowers to lie,
Ripe fruits around, and thence to look on them ,
And some were fain to lift their kirtles' hem,
And through the shallows chase the fishes fleet ;
But in this shallop would I have my seat
Alone, and holding this my little son,
And knowing not that my good days were done.

" Now how it chanced, in sooth I cannot say.
But yet I think that one there was that day,
Who for some hidden cause did hate me sore,
Who cut the cord that bound me to the shore,
And soon amidst my helpless shrieks the boat,
Oarless and sailless, out to sea did float.

" But now that many a danger has been passed,
'The gods have sent me to your land at last,
Alive, indeed, but such-like as you see,
Cold and drenched through with washing of the sea.
Half-clad, and kneeling on an unknown land,
And for a morsel holding out my hand "

Then said he, " Lady, fear not any more,

For thou art come unto no savage shore,
But here shall be a queen as erst at home :
And if thou askest whereto thou art come
This is the isle Seriphos ; and for me,
My name is Dictys, and right royally
My brother lives, the king of all the isle.
Him shalt thou see within a little while,
And doubtless he will give thee everything
That 'longs unto the daughter of a king.

“ Meanwhile I bid thee in mine house to rest,
And there thy wearied body shall be dressed
In seemly raiment by my women slaves,
And thou shalt wash thee from the bitter waves,
And eat and drink, and sleep full easily
And on the morrow shalt thou come with me
And take King Polydectes by the hand,
Who in good peace rules o'er this quiet land.”

Then on his horse he set the Queen, while he
Walked by the side thereof right soberly,
And half asleep, as slow they went along,
She laid her hand upon the war-horse strong,
While Dictys by her side Jove's offspring bore,
And thus they left the sea-beat yellow shore.
And as one dreaming to the house she came,
Where in the sun the brazen doors did flame ;
And there she ate and drank as in a dream ;
Dreamlike to her the scented bath did seem
After the icy sprinkling of the waves,
And like a dream the fair, slim women-slaves.

Who laid her in the soft bed, where she slept
Dreamless, until the horned white moon had stept
Over the fresh pine-scented hills again.

But when the sun next day drove forth his wain,
The damsel, clad in queen-like gold array,
With Dictys to the palace took her way ;
And there by minstrels duly were they met,
Who brought them to the great hall, where was set
The King upon a royal throne of gold :
Black-bearded was he, thirty summers old,
Comely and strong, and seemed a king indeed ;
Who, when he saw the minstrels thither lead
Fair Danaë, rose up to her, and said :
“ Oh, welcome, lady ! be no more afraid
That thou shalt lose thy state and dignity :
Yea, since a gem the gods have sent to me,
With plates of silver will I overlay
The casket that hath brought it on the way,
And set it in King Neptune's house to stand
Until the sea shall wash away the land.

“ And for thyself a fair house shalt thou have
With all things needful, and right many a slave,
Both men and women ; fair shall all things be
That thou mayst dwell here in felicity,
And that no care may wrinkle thy smooth brow.

“ And for the child, when he is old enow
The priests of Pallas shall of him have care,
And thou shalt dwell hard by her temple fair ;
But on this good day in mine hall abide,

And do me grace in sitting by my side."

Then mounted she the dais and sat, and then
Was she beheld of all the island men
Who praised her much, and praised the sturdy child
Who at their shouting made as if he smiled.

So passed the feast, and when the day had end
Unto her house did wearied Danaë wend,
That stood amid Minerva's olive trees
Hidden away from moaning of the seas.

And there began fair Danaë's life again,
And quite forgotten was her ancient pain,
And peacefully did day succeed to day,
While fairer grew the well-loved child away,
And strong and wise beyond his scanty years,
And in the island all his little peers
Held him for lord whatso might be their worth,
And Perseus is his name from this time forth.

L O, eighteen summers now have come and gone
Since on the beach fair Danaë stood alone
Holding her little son, nor yet was she
Less fair than when the hoarse unwilling sea
Moaned loud that Neptune drew him from her feet,
And the wind sighed upon her bosom sweet.

For in that long-past half-forgotten time,
While yet the world was young, and the sweet clime,
Golden and mild, no bitter storm-clouds bred,
Light lay the years upon the untroubled head.
And longer men lived then by many a year
Than in these days, when every week is dear.

Now on a day was held a royal feast
Whereon there should be slain full many a beast
Unto Minerva ; thereto the King came,
And in his heart love lit a greedy flame
At sight of Danaë's arms stretched out in prayer
Unto the goddess, and her yellow hair,
Wreathed round with olive wreaths, that hung adown
Over the soft folds of her linen gown ;
And when at last he took her by the hand
Speechless by her did Polydectes stand,
So was he with desire bewildered
At sight of all that wondrous white and red,
That peaceful face wherein all past distress
Had melted into perfect loveliness.

So when that night he lay upon his bed,
Full many a thought he turned within his head
Of how he best might unto that attain,
Whose lack now filled him with such burning pain.
And at the first it seemed a little thing
For him who was a rich man and a king,
Either by gifts to win her, or to send
And fetch her thither, and perforce to end

Her widowhood ; but then there came the thought
" By force or gifts hither she might be brought,
And here might I get that for which I long,
Yet has she here a son both brave and strong,
Nor will he think it much to end my days
If he may get thereby the people's praise,
E'en if therewith he shortly needs must die ;
Ah, verily, a purblind fool was I,
That when I first beheld that matchless face
I had no eyes to see her heavenly grace ;
Then with few words might I have held her here
And kept her for mine own with little tear ,
But now I have no will the lad to slay,
For he would be revenged some evil day,
Who now Jove's offspring do I think to be,
So dowered he is with might and majesty.

" Yet could I find perchance some fair pretence
Whereby with honour I might send him hence,
Nor have the youngling's blood upon my head,
Then might he be well-nigh as good as dead."

So pondering on his bed long time he lay,
Until the night began to mix with day,
And then he smiled and so to sleep turned round,
As though at last some sure way he had found.

And now it chanced to come round to the day,
When all the lords clad in their rich array
Unto the King should come for royal feast ;
And there the custom was, that most and least

Should thither bear some present for the King,
As horse or sword, gold chain, fair cup, or ring.
Unto which feast was Perseus bidden now
Who giftless came, bare as the winter bough,
For little was his wealth in that strange land.

So there ashamed it was his lot to stand,
Before the guests were called to meat, and when
He sat amidst those royally-clad men
Little he spake for shame of his estate,
Not knowing yet his god-like birth and great.

So passed the feast, and when the full time came
To show the gifts, he waxed all red for shame :
For through the hall white horses were brought up,
And well-clad slaves, and many a dainty cup,
And many a gem well set in brooch or ring,
And laid before the daïs of the King.
But all alone of great folk of the land
With eyes cast down for rage did Perseus stand,
Yet for his manhood thence he would not go.

Now some that secretly were bidden so,
Beholding him began to gibe and jeer,
Yet not too loud, held back perchance by fear,
And thus a murmur spread about the hall
As, each to each, men cast about the ball,
Which the King heard, or seemed to hear at last,
And round the noisy hall a look he cast,
And then beholding Perseus with a smile
He said, " Good friends, fair lords, be still awhile
And say no ill about this giftless guest,

For truly not the worst, it scarce the best,
I hold him, and forsooth so rich I live
Within this land, that I myself may give
Somewhat to him, nor yet take from him aught,
And when I bade him here this was my thought "

Then stretching out his arm did he take up
From off the board, a jewelled golden cup
And said, " O Perseus, come and sit by me,
And from my hand take this, that thou dost see
And be my friend." Then Perseus drew near.
And took the cup and said, " This shall be dear
Unto mine eyes while on the earth I live ;
And yet a gift I in my turn may give,
When to this land comes bitter war, or when
Some enemy thou hast among great men ;
Yea, sire, among these knights and lords I swear
To do whatso thou bidd'st me without fear."

Then the King smiled and said, " Yea, verily
Then wilt thou give a noble gift to me,
Nor yet, forsooth, too early by a day ;
To-morrow may'st thou be upon thy way.

" Far in the western sea a land there is
Desert and vast, and emptied of all bliss,
Where dwell the Gorgons wretchedly enow ;
Two of them die not, one above her brow
And wretched head bears serpents, for the shame
That on an ill day fell upon her name.
When in Minerva's shrine great sin was wrought,

For thither by the Sea-god she was brought,
And in the maiden's house in love they mixed ;
Who wrathful, in her once fair tresses fixed
That snaky brood, and shut her evermore
Within a land west of the Lybian shore.

“ Now if a king could gain this snaky head
Full well for war were he apparelled,
Because no man may look thereon and live.
A great gift, therefore, Perseus, wouldst thou give
If thou shouldst bring this wonder unto me ;
And for the place, far in the western sea
It lies, I say, but nothing more I know,
Therefore I bid thee, to some wise man go
Who has been used this many a day to pore
O'er ancient books of long-forgotten lore.”

Thus spoke the King, knowing the while full well
None but a god of that far land could tell.

But Perseus answered, “ O my Lord, the King,
Thou settest me to win a dreadful thing,
Yet for thy bounty this gift will I give
Unto thine hands, if I should chance to live.”

With that he turned, and silent, full of thought,
From out the hall he passed not noting aught,
And toward his home he went but soberly,
And thence went forth an ancient man to see
He hoped might tell him that he wished to know
And to what land it were the best to go.
But when he told the elder all the tale,

He shook his head, and said, " Nought will avail
My lore for this, nor dwell the man on earth
Whose wisdom for this thing will be of worth,
Yea, to this dreadful land no man shall win
Unless some god himself shall help therein ;
Therefore, my son, I rede thee stay at home,
For thou shalt have full many a chance to roam
Seeking for something that all men love well,
Not for an unknown isle where monsters dwell."

Then forth again went Perseus soberly
And walked along the border of the sea,
Upon the yellow sands where first he came
That time when he was deemed his mother's shame.

And now was it the first hour of the night,
Therefore within the west a yellow light
Yet shone, though risen was the horned moon,
Whose lonely cold grey beams would quench it soon,
Though now her light was shining doubtfully
On the wet sands, for low down was the sea
But rising, and the salt-sea wind blew strong
And drave the hurrying breakers swift along.
So there walked Perseus thinking many a thing
About those last words of the wily king,
And as he went at last he came upon
An ancient woman, who said, " Fair, my son,
What dost thou wandering here in the cold night ?
When in the King's hall glance from shade to light
The golden sandals of the dancing girls,

And in the gold cups set with gems and pearls
The wine shines fair that glads the heart of man ;
What dost thou wandering 'neath the moonlight wan ?"

" 'This have I done." said he, "as one should swear
To make the vine bear bunches twice a-year,
For I have sworn the Gorgon's head to bring
A worthy gift unto our island King,
When neither I, nor any man can tell
In what far land apart from men they dwell.
Some god alone can help me in my need ;
And yet unless somehow I do the deed
An exile I must be from this fair land,
Nor with my peers shall I have heart to stand."

Grim in the moonlight smiled the aged crone,
And said, " If living there thou com'st, alone
Of all men yet, what thinkest thou to do ?
Then verily thy journey shalt thou rue,
For whoso looks upon that face meets death,
That in his sick heart freezes up his breath
Until he has the semblance of a stone."

But Perseus answered straightly to the crone,
" O Mother, if the gods but give me grace
To come anigh that fair and dreadful face,
Well may they give me grace enough also
Their enemy and mine to lay alow."

Now as he spake, the white moon risen high
Burst from a cloud, and shone out gloriously,
And down the sands her path of silver shone,

And lighted full upon that ancient crone ;
And there a marvel Perseus saw indeed,
Because in face, in figure, and in weed,
She wholly changed before his wondering eyes.

Now tall and straight her figure did arise,
That erst seemed bent with weight of many a year,
And on her head a helmet shone out clear
For the rent clout that held the grizzled head :
With a fair breastplate was she furnished,
From whence a hauberk to her knees fell down ;
And underneath, a perfumed linen gown,
O'erwrought with many-coloured Indian silk,
Fell to her sandall'd feet, as white as milk.
Grey-eyed she was, like amber shone her hair,
Aloft she held her right arm round and bare,
Whose hand upheld a spear-shaft nigh the steel.

Unwonted trembling fear did Perseus feel
When he beheld before him Pallas stand,
And with bowed head he stood and outstretched hand
But she smiled on him softly, and she said,
“ Hold up again, O Perseus, thy fair head,
Because thou art indeed my father's son,
And in this quest that now thou goest upon
Thou shalt not fail : I swear it by my head,
And that black water all immortals dread.

“ Look now before my feet, and thou shalt see
Four helpful things the high gods lend to thee,
Not willing thou shouldst journey forth in vain :

Hermes himself, the many-eyed one's bane,
Gives these two-wingéd shoes, to carry thee
Tireless on high o'er every land and sea ;
This cap is his whose chariot caught away
The maid of Enna from her gentle play ;
And if thou art hard-pressed of any one
Set this on thee, and so be seen of none :
The halting god was craftsman of this blade,
No better shone, when, making heaven afraid,
The giants round our golden houses cried,
For neither brass nor steel its edge can bide,
Or flinty rocks or gleaming adamant :
With these, indeed, but one thing dost thou want,
And that I give thee ; little need'st thou reck
Of those grey hopeless eyes, if round thy neck
Thou hang'st this shield, that, hanging once on mine,
In the grim giant's hopeless eyes did shine.

“ And now be strong, and fly forth with good heart
Far northward, till thou seest the ice-walls part
The weary sea from snow-clad lands and wan,
Untrodden yet by any son of man.
There dwell the Gorgons' ancient sisters three
Men call the Graiæ, who make shift to see
With one eye, which they pass from hand to hand
Now make thyself unseen in this white land
And snatch the eye, while crooning songs they sit,
From hand to withered hand still passing it ;
And let them buy it back by telling thee
How thou shalt find within the western sea
The unknown country where their sisters dwell

“ Which thing unto thee I myself would tell,
But when with many a curse I set them there,
I in my wrath by a great oath did swear
I would not name again the country grey
Wherein they dwell. with little light of day.

“ Good speed, O Perseus ; make no tarrying,
But straightly set thyself to do this thing.”

Now as his ears yet rung with words like these,
And on the sand he sank upon his knees
Before the goddess, there he knelt alone
As in a dream ; but still the white moon shone
Upon the sword, the shield, and cap and shoes,
Which half afeard he was at first to use,
Until the goddess gave him heart at last,
And his own gear in haste aside he cast,
And armed himself in that wild, lonely place :
Then turning round, northward he set his face,
And rose aloft and o’er the lands ’gan fly,
Betwixt the green earth and the windy sky.

Young was the night when first he left the sands
Of small Seriphos, but right many lands
Before the moon was down his winged feet
Had borne him over, tireless, strong, and fleet.
Then in the starlight black beneath him lay
The German forests, where the wild swine play,
Fearless of what Diana’s maids may do,
Who ever have more will to wander through
The warm and grassy woods of Thessaly,

Or in Sicilian orange-gardens lie.

But ere the hot sun on his arms 'gan shine
He had passed o'er the Danube and the Rhine,
And heard the faint sound of the northern sea ;
But ever northward flew untiringly,
Till Thule lay beneath his feet at last.
Then o'er its desert icy hills he passed,
And on beneath a feeble sun he flew,
Till, rising like a wall, the cliffs he knew
That Pallas told him of : the sun was high,
But on the bleak ice shone but wretchedly ;
Pale blue the great mass was, and cold snow ;
Grey tattered moss hung from its jagged brow,
No wind was there at all, though ever beat
The leaden tideless sea against its feet.

Then lighted Perseus on that dreary land,
And when on the white plain his feet did stand
He saw no sign of either beast or man,
Except that near by rose a palace wan,
Built of some metal that he could not name.
Thither he went, and to a great door came
That stood wide open, so without a word
He entered in, and drew his deadly sword,
Though neither sword or man might one behold
More than folk see their death ere they grow old.

So having entered, through a cloister grey
With cautious steps and slow he took his way
At end whereof he found a mighty hall ;

Where, bare of hangings, a white marble wall
And milk-white pillars held the roof aloft,
And nothing was therein of fair or soft ;
And at one end, upon a dais high,
There sat the crones that had the single eye,
Clad in blue sweeping cloak and snow-white gown ,
While o'er their backs their straight white hair hung
down

In long thin locks ; dreadful their faces were
Carved all about with wrinkles of despair ;
And as they sat they crooned a dreary song,
Complaining that their lives should last so long.
In that sad place that no one came anear,
In that wan place desert of hope and fear ;
And singing, still, they rocked their bodies bent,
And ever each to each the eye they sent.

Awhile stood Perseus gazing on the three
Then sheathed his sword, and toward them warily
He went, and from the last one snatched the eye,
Who, feeling it gone from her, with a cry
Sprung up and said, " O sisters, he is here
That we were warned so long ago to fear,
And verily he has the eye of me."

Then those three, thinking they no more should see
What feeble light the sun could show them there,
And that of all joys now their life was bare.
Began a wailing and lamenting sore
That they were worse than ever heretofore.

Then Perseus cried, "Unseen am I indeed,
But yet a mortal man, who have a need
Your wisdom can make good, if so ye will ;
Now neither do I wish you any ill,
Nor this your treasure will I keep from you
If ye will tell me what I needs must do
To gain, upon the earth or under it,
The dreary country where your sisters sit .
Of whom, as wise men say, the one is fair
As any goddess, but with snaky hair
And body that shall perish on some day,
While the two others ancient are, and grey
As ye be, but shall see the whole world die."

Then said they, "Rash man, give us back the eye
Or rue this day, for wretched as we are,
Beholding not fair peace or godlike war,
Or any of the deeds of men at all,
Yet are we strong, and on thy head shall fall
Our heavy curses, and but dismally
Thy life shall pass until thou com'st to die."

"Make no delay," he said, "to do this thing,
Or this your cherished sight I soon shall fling
Into the sea, or burn it up with fire."

"What else, what else, but this wilt thou desire?"
They said, "Wilt thou have long youth at our hands?
Or wilt thou be the king of lovely lands?
Or store up wealth to lead thy life in mirth?
Or wilt thou have the beauty of the earth
With all her kindness for thy very own?"

Choose what thou wilt except this thing alone."

"Nay," said he, "for nought else I left my home
For this sole knowledge hither am I come,
Not all unholpen of the gods above ;
Nor yet shall words my stedfast purpose move."

Then with that last word did he hold his peace,
And they no less from wailing words did cease,
Hoping that in that silence he might think
Of their dread words and from the evils shrink
Wherewith they threatened him ; but in his heart
Most godlike courage fit for such a part
The white-armed goddess of the loom had set.
Nor in that land her help did he forget.

Withal, when many an hour had now gone by,
Together did the awesome sisters cry,
"O man ! O man ! hear that which thou would'st know.
And with thy knowledge let the dread curse go,
Which us hath cursed most of all those who dwell
Upon this wretched fire-concealing shell.
Slave of the cruel gods ! go, get ye hence,
And storing deeds for fruitless penitence,
Go east, as though in Scythia were thine home,
But when unto the wind-beat seas ye come
Stop short, and turn round to the south again
Until ye reach the western land of Spain :
Then o'er the straits ye soon shall come to be
Betwixt the ocean and the inner sea.
Thenceforth go westward even as thou mayst

Until ye find a dark land long laid waste,
Where green cliffs rise from out an inky sea.
But no green leaf may grow on bush or tree.
No sun makes day there, no moon lighteth night,
The long years there must pass in grey twilight ;
There dwell our sisters, walking dismally,
Between the dull-brown caverns and the sea.

“Took in the hand of god ! do there thy might !
Nor fall like us, nor strive for peace and right ;
But give our own unto us and be gone,
And leave us to our misery all alone.”

Then straight he put the eye into the hand
Of her that spoke, and turned from that white land.
Leaving them singing their grim song again.
But flying forth he came at last to Spain,
And so unto the southern end of it,
And then with restless wings due west did flit.
For many a day across the sea he flew,
That lay beneath him clear enough and blue,
Until at last rose such a thick grey mist,
That of what lay beneath him nought he wist ;
But still through this he flew a night and day
Harkening the washing of the watery way,
Unseen : but when, at ending of the night,
The mist was gone and grey sea came in sight,
He thought that he had reached another world ;
This way and that the leaden seas were hurled.

Moved by no wind, but by some unseen power ;
Twilight it was and still his feet dropped lower,
As through the thickening, dim hot air he passed,
Until he feared to reach the sea at last.

But even as his feet dragged in the sea,
He, praying to the goddess fervently,
Felt her good help, for soon he rose again
Three fathoms up, and flew with lessened pain ;
And looking through the dinness could behold
The wretched land whereof the sisters told.
And soon could see how down the green cliff's fell
A yellow stream, that from some inland well
Arose, and through the land ran sluggishly,
Until it poured with dull splash in the sea
Like molten lead ; and nigher as he came
He saw great birds, whose kind he could not name,
That whirling noiselessly about did seem
To seek a prey within that leaden stream ;
And drawing nigher yet, at last he saw
That many of them held, with beak or claw,
Great snakes they tore still flying through the air.
Then making for the cliff and lighting there
He saw, indeed, that tawny stream and dull
Of intertwining writhen snakes was full,
So, with a shudder, thence he turned away,
And through the untrodden land he took his way.

Now cave-pierced rocks there rose up everywhere,
And gaunt old trees, of leaves and fruit all bare ;
And midst this wretchedness a mighty hall,

Whose great stones made a black and shining wall ;
The doors were open, and thence came a cry
Of one in anguish wailing bitterly ;
Then o'er its threshold passed the son of Jove,
Well shielded by the grey-eyed Maiden's love.

Now there he saw two women bent and old,
Like to those three that north he did behold,
There were they sitting well-nigh motionless,
Their eyes grown stony with their long distress,
Staring at nought, and still no sound they made,
And on their knees their wrinkled hands were laid.

But a third woman paced about the hall,
And ever turned her head from wall to wall
And moaned aloud, and shrieked in her despair :
Because the golden tresses of her hair
Were moved by writhing snakes from side to side,
That in their writhing oftentimes would glide
On to her breast, or shuddering shoulders white ;
Or, falling down, the hideous things would light
Upon her feet, and crawling thence would twine
Their slimy folds about her ankles fine.
But in a thin red garment was she clad,
And round her waist a jewelled band she had,
The gift of Neptune on the fatal day
When fate her happiness first put away.

So there awhile unseen did Perseus stand,
With softening heart, and doubtful trembling hand
Laid on his sword-hilt, muttering, " Would that she
Had never turned her woeful face to me."

But therewith Pallas smote him with this thought,
“Does she desire to live, who has been brought
Into such utter woe and misery,
Wherefrom no god or man can set her free,
Since Pallas’ dreadful vow shall bind her fast,
Till earth and heaven are gone, and all is past?
—And yet, would God the thing were at an end.”

Then with that word, he saw her stop and rend
The raiment from her tender breast and soft,
And with a great cry lift her arms aloft;
Then on her breast her head sank, as she said,
“O ye, be merciful, and strike me dead!
How many an one cries unto you to live,
Which gift ye find no little thing to give,
O give it now to such, and unto me
That other gift from which all people flee!

“O was it not enough to take away
The flowery meadows and the light of day?
Or not enough to take away from me
The once-loved faces that I used to see;
To take away sweet sounds and melodies,
The song of birds, the rustle of the trees;
To make the prattle of the children cease,
And wrap my soul in shadowy hollow peace,
Devoid of longing? Ah, no, not for me!
For those who die your friends this rest shall be;
For me no rest from shame and sore distress,
For me no moment of forgetfulness;
For me a soul that still might love and hate.

Shut in this fearful land and desolate,
Changed by mine eyes to horror and to stone ;
For me perpetual anguish all alone,
Midst many a tormenting misery,
Because I know not if I e'er shall die.

“ And yet, and yet, thee will I pray unto,
Thou dweller in the shifting halls of blue,
Fathoms beneath the treacherous bridge of lands.
Call now to mind that day upon the sands,
Hard by the house of Pallas white and cold,
Where hidden in some wave thou didst behold
This body, fearless of the cold grey sea,
And dowered as yet with fresh virginity.

“ How many things thou promisedst me then !
Who among all the daughters of great men
Should be like me ? what sweet and happy life !
What peace, if all the world should be at strife,
Thou promisedst me then ! Lay all aside,
And give unto the great Earth-Shaker's bride
That which the wretch shut up in prison drear,
Deprived of all, yet ceases not to fear ;
That which all men fear more than all distress,
The rest of death, and dull forgetfulness.”

Her constant woeful prayer was heard at last,
For now behind her unseen Perseus passed,
And silently whirled the great sword around ;
And when it fell, she fell upon the ground,
And felt no more of all her bitter pain.

But from their seats rose up with curses vain
The two immortals when they saw her fall
Headless upon the floor, and loud 'gan call
On those that came not, because far away
Their friends and kindred were upon that day.
Then to and fro about the hall they ran
To find the slayer, were he god or man,
And when unseen from out the place he drew,
Upon the unhappy corpse, with wails, they threw
Their wretched and immortal bodies old ;
But when the one the other did behold,
Alive and hideous there before her eyes,
Such anguish for the past time would arise
Within their hearts, that the lone hall would ring
With dreadful shrieks of many an impious thing.

Yet of their woe but little Perseus knew,
As with a stout heart south-east still he flew.

NOW at his side a wallet Perseus bore,
With threads of yellow gold embroidered o'er,
Shuddering, therein he laid the fearful head,
Lest he unwitting yet might join the dead,
Or those he loved by sight of it be slain.

But strong fate led him to the Lybian plain,
Where, at the ending of a sultry day,

A palace huge and fair beneath him lay,
Whose roofs with silver plates were covered o'er ;
Then lighting down by its enormous door,
He heard unmeasured sounds of revelry,
And thought, ' A fair place this will be for me,
Who lack both food and drink, and rest this night.'
So turning to the ruddy flood of light,
Up the huge steps he toiled unto the hall ;
But even as his eager foot did fall
Upon the threshold, such a mocking shout
Rang in his ears as Etna sendeth out
When, at the day's end, round the stithy cold
The Cyclops some unmeasured banquet hold.
And monstrous men could he see sitting there,
Burnt by the sun, with length of straight back hair,
And taller far than men are wont to be ;
And at a gold-strewn daïs could he see
A mighty King, a fearful man to face,
Brown-skinned and black-haired, of the giants' race,
Who seeing him, with thundering voice 'gan call,
" O Stranger, come forthwith into the hall,
Atlas would see thee !" Forth stood Perseus then,
And going 'twixt the rows of uncouth men
Seemed but a pigmy ; but his heart was great,
And vain is might against the stroke of fate.

Then the King cried, " Who art thou, little one ?
Surely in thy land weak must be the sun
If there are bred such tender folk as thou :
May the gods grant such men are few enow !

Art thou a king's son ?" Loud he laughed withal,
And shouts of laughter rang throughout the hall,
Like clattering thunder on a July night.
But Perseus quailed not. " Little were my might,"
He said, " if helpless on the earth I were ;
But to the equal gods my life is dear,
And certes victory over Jove's own son
By earthly men shall not be lightly won.

So spake he, moving inward from the door,
But louder laughed the black King than before,
And all his people shouted at his beck ;
Therewith he cried, " Break now this Prince's neck,
And take him forth and hang him up straightway
Before my door, that henceforth from this day
Pigmies and jesters may take better heed,
Lest at our hands they gain a liar's meed."

Then started up two huge men from the board,
And Perseus, seeing them come, half drew his sword
Looking this way and that ; but in a while,
Upon his wallet with a deadly smile
He set his hand, and forth the head he drew,
Dead, white midst golden hair, where serpents blue
Yet dangled dead ; and ere they stopped to take
His outstretched arms, before them he did shake
The dreadful thing : then stopped they suddenly,
Stone dead, without a wound or any cry.

Then toward the King he held aloft the head,
And as he stiffened cried at him, and said,
" O King ! when such a gift I bring to thee,

Wilt thou be dumb and neither hear nor see?
Listen how sing thy men, and in thy hall
How swift the merry dancers' feet do fall!"

For now these, thinking him some god to be,
Cried in their fear, and made great haste to flee,
Crowding about the great doors of the hall,
Until not one was left of great or small,
But the dead king, and those that there had died.—
—Lo, in such way Medusa's head was tried!

But when the living giant-folk were gone,
And with the dead men there he stood alone,
He turned him to the food that thereby lay,
And ate and drank with none to say him nay;
And on the floor at last he laid him down,
Midst heaps of unknown tawny skins and brown.

'There all the night in dreamless sleep he lay,
But rose again at the first streak of day,
And looking round about rejoiced to see
The uncouth image of his enemy,
Silent for ever, with wide mouth agape
E'en as he died; and thought, "Who now shall 'scape
When I am angry, while this gift I have?
How well my needy lovers I may save
While this dread thing still hangeth by my side!"

Then out he passed: a plain burnt up, and wide,
He saw before him, bare of any trees,
And much he longed for the green dashing seas,
And merry winds of the sweet island shore,
Fain of the gull's cry, for the lion's roar.

Yet, glad at heart, he lifted up his feet
From the parched earth, and soon the air did beat,
Going north-east, and flew forth all the day,
And when the night fell still was on the way ;
And many a sandy plain did he pass o'er,
And many a dry much trodden river shore,
Where thick the thirsty beasts stood in the night.
The stealthy leopard saw him with altright,
As whining from the thicket it crept out ;
The lion drew back at his sudden shout
From off the carcass of some slaughtered beast ;
And the thin jackals waiting for the feast
Stinted their hungry howls as he passed by ;
And black men sleeping, as he came amigh
Dreamed ugly dreams, and reached their hands to seiz
The spear or sword that lay across their knees.

So at the last the sea before him lay,
But not for that did he make any stay,
But flew on till the night began to wane,
And the grey sea was blue and green again ;
Until the sunlight on his wings shone fair,
And turned to red the gold locks of his hair.
Then in a little while he saw no land,
But all was heaving sea on every hand,
Driven this way and that way by the wind.

Still fast he flew, thinking some coast to find,
And so, about the middle of the day,
Far to the east a land before him lay,

And when unto it he was come anigh
He saw the sea beat on black cliffs and high,
With green grass growing on the tops of them,
Binding them round as gold a garment's hem.

Then slowly alongside thereof he flew
If haply by some sign the land he knew,
Until a ness he reached, whereon there stood
A tower new-built of mighty beams of wood ;
So nigh he came that, unseen, he could see
Pale haggard faces peering anxiously
From out its well-barred windows that looked forth
Into a bay that lay upon the north ;
But inland over moveless waves of down
Shone the white walls of some great royal town.
Now underneath the scarped cliffs of the bay
From horn to horn a belt of sand there lay
Fast lessening as the flood-tide swallowed it,
'There all about did the sea-swallows flit,
And from the black rocks yellow hawks flew down,
And cormorants fished amidst the sea-weed brown,
(Or on the low rocks nigh unto the sea,
While over all the fresh wind merrily
Blew from the sea, and o'er the pale blue sky
Thin clouds were stretched the way the wind went by.
And forward did the mighty waters press
As though they loved the green earth's stedfastness.
Nought slept, but everything was bright and fair
Beneath the bright sun and the noon-day air.

Now hovering there, he seemed to hear a sound
Unlike the sea-bird's cry, and, looking round,
He saw a figure standing motionless
Beneath the cliff, midway 'twixt ness and ness,
And as the wind lul'd heard that cry again,
That sounded like the wail of one in pain ;
Wondering thereat, and seeking marvels new
He lighted down, and toward the place he drew,
And made invisible by Pallas' aid,
He came within the scarped cliff's purple shade,
And found a woman standing lonely there,
Naked, except for tresses of her hair
That o'er her white limbs by the breeze were wound
And brazen chains her weary arms that bound
Unto the sea-beat overhanging rock,
As though her golden-crown'd head to mock
But nigh her feet upon the sand there lay
Rich raiment that had covered her that day,
Worthy to be the ransom of a king,
Unworthy round such loveliness to cling.

Alas, alas ! no bridal play this was,
The tremors that throughout her limbs did pass,
Her restless eyes, the catching of her breath,
Were but the work of the cold hand of death,
She waited for, midst untold miseries,
As, now with head cast back, and close-shut eyes,
She wailed aloud, and now all spent with woe
Stared out across the rising sea, as though

She deemed each minute brought the end anigh
For which in her despair she needs must cry.

Then unseen Perseus stole anigh the maid,
And love upon his heart a soft hand laid,
And tender pity rent it for her pain,
Nor yet an eager cry could he refrain,
As now, transforméd by that piteous sight,
Grown like unto a god for pride and might,
Down on the sand the mystic cap he cast
And stood before her with flushed face at last,
And grey eyes glittering with his great desire
Beneath his hair, that like a harmless fire
Blown by the wind shone in her hopeless eyes.

But she, all rigid with her first surprise,
Ceasing her wailing as she heard his cry,
Stared at him, dumb with fear and misery,
Shrunk closer yet unto the rocky place
And writhed her bound hands as to hide her face ;
But sudden love his heart did so constrain,
With open mouth he strove to speak in vain
And from his heart the hot tears 'gan to rise ;
But she midst fear beheld his kind grey eyes,
And then, as hope came glimmering through her dread,
In a weak voice he scarce could hear, she said,
" O Death ! if thou hast risen from the sea,
Sent by the gods to end this misery,
I thank them that thou comest in this form,
Who rather thought to see a hideous worm

Come trailing up the sands from out the deep,
 Or suddenly swing over from the steep
 To lap me in his folds, and bone by bone
 Crush all my body : come then, with no moan,
 Will I make ready now to leave the light.

“ But yet—thy face is wonderful and bright,
 Art thou a god? Ah, then be kind to me !
 Is there no valley far off from the sea
 Where I may live alone, afar from strife
 Nor anger any god with my poor life ?
 Or do the gods delight in misery
 And art thou come to mock me ere I die ?
 Alas, must they be pitiless, when they
 Fear not the hopeless slayer of the day !
 Speak, speak ! what meanest thou by that sad smile ?

“ O, if the gods could be but men awhile
 And learn such fearful things unspeakable
 As I have learned this morn, what man can tell
 What golden age might wrap the world again ?
 Ah, dost thou love me, is my speech not vain ?
 Did not my beauty perish on this morn
 Dost thou not kiss me now for very scorn ?
 Alas, my shame, I cannot flee from thee !
 Alas, my sin ! no green-stemmed laurel tree
 Shall mock thy grasp, no misty mountain stream
 Shall wake thee shuddering from a lovely dream,
 No helping god shall hear, but thou alone !—
 Help me, I faint ! I see not ! art thou gone ?
 Alas ! thy lips were warm upon my brow,

What good deed will it be to leave me now !

“ Oh, yet I feel thy kind and tender hand
On my chained wrist, and thou wilt find some land
Where I may live a little, free from fear

“ And yet, and yet, if thou hast sought me here
Being but a man, no manly thing it is,
Nor hope thou from henceforth to live in bliss,
If here thou wrongest me, who am but dead.”

Then as she might she hung adown her head,
Her bosom heaved with sobs, and from her eyes
Long dried amidst those hopeless miseries
Unchecked the salt tears o'er her bosom ran
As love and shame their varying strife began.

But overwhelmed with pity, mad with love
Stammering, nigh weeping spoke the son of Jove,—
“ Alas, what land is this, where such as thou
Are thus tormented ? look upon me now,
And cease thy fear ! no evil man am I,
No cruel god to mock thy misery ;
But the gods help me, and their unmoved will
Has sent me here to save thee from some ill,
I know not what ; to give thee rest from this,
And unto me unutterable bliss,
If from a man thou takest not away
The gift thou gavest to a god to-day ;
But I may be a very god to thee,
Because the gods are helpful unto me,
Nor would I fear them aught if thou wert nigh,
Since unto each it happeneth once to die.

"Speak not, sweet maid, till I have loosed thine hands
From out the grasp of these unworthy bands."

So straight, and ere her lips could frame a word,
From out its sheath he drew the gleaming sword,
And while she shut her dazzled eyes for len
To see the glittering marvel draw anear,
Unto her side her weary arms fell freed ;
Then must she shrink away, for now indeed
With rest and hope and growing love there came
Remembrance of her helplessness and shame,
Weeping she said, " My fate is but to die,
Forget the wild words of my misery,
Take a poor maiden's thanks, and leave this place,
Nor for thy pity die before my face,
As verily thou wilt if thou stay'st here ;
Because, however free thou art from fear,
What hopest thou against this beast to do,
My death, and thine unconquerable foe ?
When all a kingdom's strength has had no hope
With this strange horror, God-endowed, to cope,
But deemed it good to give up one poor maid
Unto his wrath, who makes the world afraid."

"Nay," said he, "but thy fate shall be my fate
And on these sands thy bane will I await,
Though I know nought of all his mightiness :
For scarcely yet a man, I none the less
Such things have done as make me now a name,
Nor can I live a loveless life of shame,
Or leave thee now, this day's most god-like gift,

Into some unknown mortal pain to drift."

She, hurrying as he spoke, with trembling hands
Had lifted up her raiment from the sands,
And yet therewith she was not well arrayed,
Before she turned round, ghastly white, and said,
"Look seaward and behold, my death draw nigh,
Not thine—not thine—but kiss me ere I die,
Alas! how many things I had to tell,
For certainly I should have loved thee well."

He came to her and kissed her as she sank
Into his arms, and from the horror shrank,
Clinging to him, scarce knowing he was there;
But through the drifting wonder of her hair.
Amidst his pity, he beheld the sea,
And saw a huge wave rising mightily
Above the smaller breakers of the shore,
Which in its green breast for a minute bore
A nameless horror, that it cast aland,
And left, a huge mass on the oozing sand,
That scarcely seemed a living thing to be,
Until at last those twain it seemed to see,
And gathering up its strange limbs, towards them passed.
And therewithal a dismal trumpet-blast
Rang from the tower, and from the distant town
The wind in answer brought loud wails adown.

Then Perseus gently put the maid from him,
Who sank down shivering in her every limb,
Silent despite herself for fear and woe,

As down the beach he ran to meet the foe.

But he, beholding Jove's son drawing near,
A great black fold against him did uprear,
Maned with grey tufts of hair, as some old tree
Hung round with moss, in lands where vapours be ;
From his bare skull his red eyes glowed like flame,
And from his open mouth a sound there came,
Strident and hideous, that still louder grew
As that rare sight of one in arms he knew :
But godlike, fearless, burning with desire,
'The adamant jaws and lidless eyes of fire
Did Perseus mock, and lightly leapt aside
As forward did the torture-chamber glide
Of his huge head, and ere the beast could turn,
One moment bright did blue-edged Herpe burn,
The next was quenched in the black flow of blood ;
Then in confuséd folds the hero stood,
His bright face shadowed by the jaws of death,
His hair blown backward by the poisonous breath ;
But all that passed, like lightning-lighted street
In the dark night, as the blue blade did meet
The wrinkled neck, and with no faltering stroke.
Like a god's hand the fell enchantment broke,
And then again in place of crash and roar,
He heard the shallow breakers on the shore,
And o'er his head the sea-gull's plaintive cry,
Careless as gods for who might live or die.

Then Perseus from the slimy loathsome coil

Drew out his feet, and then with little toil
Smote off the head, the terror of the lands,
And, dragging it along, went up the sands,
Shouting aloud for joy, "Arise, arise,
O thou whose name I know not! Ope thine eyes
To see the gift, that I, first seen to-day,
Am hastening now before thy feet to lay!
Look up, look up! What shall thy sweet face be,
That I have seen amidst such misery,
When thou at last beginnest to rejoice."

Slowly she rose, her burdened heart found voice
In sobs and murmurs inarticulate,
And clean forgetting all the sport of fate,
She scarce could think that she should ever die,
As locked in fearless, loving, straight embrace.
They made a heaven of that lone sandy place.

Then on a rock smoothed by the washing sea
They sat, and eyed each other lovingly.
And few words at the first the maiden said,
So wrapped she was in all the goodlihead
Of her new life made doubly happy now:
For her alone the sea-breeze seemed to blow,
For her in music did the white surf fall,
For her alone the wheeling birds did call
Over the shallows, and the sky for her
Was set with white clouds, far away and clear;
E'en as her love, this strong and lovely one
Who held her hand, was but for her alone

But after loving silence for a while.

She, turning round to him her heavenly smile,
Said, "Tell me, O my love, what name is thine,
What mother brought thee forth so nigh divine,
Whence art thou come to take away my shame?"

Then said he, "Fair love, Perseus is my name,
Not known of men, though that may come to be
And her that bore me men call Danaë,
And tales of my begetting people tell
And call my father, Jove: but it befell
Unto my mother, when I first was born,
That she, cast out upon the sea, forlorn
Of help of men, unto Seriphos came:
And there she dwells as now, not gathering shame
But called a Queen; and thence I come indeed,
Sent by the gods to help thee in thy need."

Then he began and told her everything
Down to the slaying of the monstrous king,
She listening to him meanwhile, glad at heart
That he had played so fair and great a part.
But all being told, she said, "This salt pool nigh
Left by the tide, now mirrors well the sky,
So smooth it is, and now I stand anear
Canst thou not see my foolish visage clear,
Yea, e'en the little gems upon my hands?
May I not see this marvel of the lands
So mirrored, and yet live—make no delay
The sea is pouring fast into the bay,
And we must soon be gone."

"Look down," he said,

"And take good heed thou turnest not thine head."
Then gazing down, with shuddering dread and awe,
Over her imaged shoulder, soon she saw
The head rise up, so beautiful and dread,
That, white and ghastly, yet seemed scarcely dead
Beside the image of her own fair face,
As, daring not to move from off the place,
But trembling sore, she cried, "Enough, O love !
What man shall doubt thou art the son of Jove ;
I think thou wilt not die : " then with her hand
She hid her eyes, and trembling did she stand
Until she felt his lips upon her cheek ;
Then turning round, with anxious eyes and meek,
She gazed upon him, and some doubtful thought
Up to her brow the tender colour brought,
And sinking somewhat down her golden head,
Stammering a little now these words she said,—

"O godlike man, thou dost not ask my name,
Or why folk gave me up to death and shame ;
Dost thou not dread I am some sorceress,
Whose evil deeds well earned me that distress ?"

"Tell me thy name," he said ; "yet as for thee
I deem that thou wert bound beside the sea,
Because the gods would have the dearest thing
Which thy land held for its own ransoming."

She said, "O love, the sea is rising fast,
And time it is that we henceforth were past :
The only path that leadeth to the down
Is far, and thence a good way is the town ;

Wend we, and on our journey will I tell
How all these things, now come to nought, befell."

"Lead me," he said, and lifted from the sand
The monster's head ; and therewith, hand in hand,
Together underneath the cliffs they went,
The while she told her tale to this intent.

"This is the Syrian land, this town anigh
Is Joppa, and Andromeda am I,
Daughter of him who holds the sceptre there,
King Cepheus and Cassiope the fair.

"She, smit by cruel madness, brought ill fate
Upon the land to make it desolate ;
For by the place whence thou deliveredst me,
An altar to the daughters of the sea
Erewhile there stood, and we in solemn wise,
Unto the maids were wont to sacrifice,
And give them gifts of honey, oil, and wine,
That we might have the love of folk divine ;
And so it chanced that on a certain day,
When from that place the sea was ebb'd away
Upon the firm sands I and many a maid
About that altar went, while the flutes played
Such notes as sea-folk love ; and as we went
Upon the wind rich incense-clouds we sent
About the hallowed stone, whereon there lay
Fruits of the earth for them to bear away ;
Thus did we maids, as we were wont to do,
And watching us, as was their wont also,

Our mothers stood, my own amidst the rest.

“ But ere the rites were done, as one possessed
She cried aloud, ‘ Alas, what do we now,
Such honour unto unseen folk to show !
To spend our goods, our labour, and our lives,
In serving these the careless sea-wind drives
Hither and thither through the booming seas ;
While thou Andromeda art queen of these,
And in thy limbs such lovely godhead moves,
That thou shalt be new Mother of the Loves ;
Thou shalt not die ! Go, child, and sit alone,
And take our homage on thy golden throne ;
And I that bore thee will but be thy slave,
Nor shall another any worship have.’

“ Trembling awhile we stood with heads downcast,
To hear those words, then from the beach we passed ;
And sick at heart each went unto her home
Expecting when the fearful death should come,
Like those of Thebes, who, smit by arrows, fell
Before the feet of her who loved too well.

“ And yet stayed not my mother’s madness there ;
She caused men make a silver image fair
Of me unhappy, round the base she writ
‘ *Fairest of all*,’ and bade men carry it,
With flowers and music, down unto the sea,
Who on the altar fixed it solidly
Against the beating of the winds and waves.

“ But we, expecting now no quiet graves,
Trembled at every murmur of the night,

And if a cloud should hide the noon sun bright
Grew faint with terror ; yet the days went by
Harmless above our great iniquity,
Until one wretched morn I woke to hear,
Down in the street loud wails and cries of fear,
And my heart died within me, nor durst I
Ask for the reason of that bitter cry,
Though soon I knew it—nigh unto the sea
Were gathered folk for some festivity ;
When, at the happiest moment of their feast,
Forth from the deep there came a fearful beast
No man could name, who quickly snatched away
Their fairest maid, and with small pain did slay
Such men as there in arms before him stood ;
For unto him was steel as rotten wood,
And darts as straw—nor grew the story old,
Day after day e'en such a tale was told.
—Kiss me, my love ! I grow afraid again ;
Kiss me amid the memory of my pain.
Draw me to thee that I thine arms may feel,
A better help than triple brass or steel !

“ Alas, love ! folk began to look on me
With angry eyes, and mutter gloomily,
As pale and trembling through the streets I passed
And from the heavy thunder-cloud, at last
The dreadful lightning quivered through the air :
For on a day the people filled the square
With arms and tumult, and my name I heard,
But heard no more ; for, shuddering and afraid,

Unto my far-off quiet bower I fled,
And from that moment deemed myself but dead.
How the time passed I know not, what they did
I know not now ; for like a quail half hid,
When the hawk's pinions shade the sun from him,
Crouching adown, I felt my life wax dim.

“The gods have made us mighty certainly
That we can bear such things and yet not die.
This morn—Ah, love, and was it yet this year,
Wherein thou camest to me, kind and dear?—
This morn they brought me forth, they did on me
This mocking raiment bright with bravery ;
'They mocked my head with gold, with gems my feet,
My heart with lovely songs and music sweet.
Thou wouldst have wept to see me led along
Amidst that dreary pomp with flowers and song,
But if folk wept, how could I note it then ;
Most vain to me were grown all ways of men.

“They brought me to mine image on the sands,
They took it down, they bore it in their hands
To deck mine empty tomb, I think, and then—
O cruel is the fearfulness of men,
Striving a little while to 'scape death's pain !—
My naked body they spared not to chain,
Lest I should 'scape the death from which they fled,
Then left me there alone and shamed—and dead—
While to his home each went again, to live
Such vain forgetful life as fate might give.

“O love, to think that love can pass away,
That, soon or late, to us shall come a day
When this shall be forgotten ! e'en this kiss
That makes us now forget the high God's bliss,
And sons of men with all their miseries.”

“Turn round,” he said, “and let thy well-loved eyes
Behold the sea from this high grassy hill,
And thou shalt see the risen waves now fill
The bay from horn to horn of it : no more
Thy footprints bless the shell-strewn sandy shore,
The vale the monster scooped as 'neath my sword
He writhed, the black stream that from out him poured,
The rock we sat on, and the pool wherein
Thou sawest the gods' revenge for heedless sin—
How the green ripples of the shallow sea
Cover the strife and passion peacefully,
Nor lack the hallowing of the low broad sun.

“So has love stolen upon us, lovely one,
And quenched our old lives in this new delight,
And if thou needs must think of that dull night
That creepeth on no otherwise than this,
Yet for that thought hold closer to thy bliss,
Come nigher, come ! forget the more thy pain.”

So there of all love's feasting were they fain,
Words fail to tell the joyance that they had,
And with what words they made each other glad.

SO, as it drew to ending of the day,
Unto the city did they take their way.
And when they stood before its walls at last
They found the heavy gate thereof shut fast.
And no one on the walls for very shame ;
Then to the wicket straightway Perseus came,
And down the monster's grinning head he threw,
While on the horn a mighty blast he blew,
But no one answered ; then he cried aloud,
" Come forth, O warders, and no more shrink cowed
Behind your battlements ! one man alone
Has dared to do what thousands have not done,
And the great beast besides the sea lies dead :
Come forth, come forth ! and gaze upon this head ! "

Then opened was the door a little way,
And one peered forth and saw him with the may,
And turning round some joyous words he cried
Unto the rest, who oped the great gates wide,
And through them Perseus the saved maiden led.
Then as the folk cast eyes upon the head,
They stopped their shouts to gaze thereon with fear
And timidly the women drew anear ;
But soon, beholding Perseus' godlike grace,
His mighty limbs, and flushed and happy face,
Cried out unto the maid, " O happy thou,
Who art well paid for every trouble now,
In winning such a godlike man as this. "

And many there were fain his skirts to kiss ;
But he smiled down on them, and said, " Rejoice,
O girls, indeed, but yet lift heart and voice
Unto the gods to-day, and not to me !
For they it was who sent me to this sea.
And first of all fail not to bless the Maid
Through whom it came that I was not afraid."

So through the streets they went, and quickly spread
News that the terror of the land was dead.
And folk thronged round to see the twain go by,
Or went before with flowers and minstrelsy,
Rejoicing for the slaying of their shame.

Thus harbinger'd the happy lovers came
Unto King Cepheus' royal house of gold.
To whom by this the joyful cries had told
That all was changed and still his days were good,
So, eager in his well-built porch he stood,
No longer now in mournful raiment clad.

But when they met, then were those two more glad
Than words can say ; there came her mother, too,
And round about her neck fair arms she threw,
Weeping for joy ; and all about the King
The great men stood and eyed the fearful thing
That lay at Perseus' feet : then the King said,
" O thou, who on this day hast saved my maid,
Wilt thou rule half my kingdom from to-day ?
Or wilt thou carry half my wealth away ?
Or in some temple shall we honour thee,

Setting thine image up beside the sea?
Ask what thou wilt before these mighty lords,
And straightway is it thine without more words."

Then in his heart laughed Perseus : and, "O King,"
He said, "I ask indeed a mighty thing ;
Yet neither will I take thy wealth away,
Or make thee less a king than on this day
And in no temple shall mine image stand
To look upon the sea that beats the land,
For fear the God who now is friend to me
Thereby should come to be mine enemy ;
And yet on this day am I grown so bold,
I ask a greater gift than power or gold ;
Give me thy maiden saved, to be my bride,
And let me go, because the world is wide,
And the gods hate me not, and I am fain
Some fertile land with these my hands to gain.
Nor think thereby that thou wilt get thee shame.
For if thou askest of my race and name,
Perseus I am, the son of Danaë,
Born nigh to Argos, by the sounding sea,
And those that know, call me the son of Jove,
Who in past days my mother's face did love."

Then, glad at heart, the King said, "Poor indeed
Were such a gift, to give thee to thy meed
This that thine own unconquered hands have won
O ye ! bring now the head and cast thereon
Jewels and gold from out my treasury,
Till nothing of its grimness men can see ;

And let folk bring round to the harbour mouth
My ship that saileth yearly to the south ;
That to his own land since it is his will
This Prince may go ; nor yet without his fill
Of that which all men long for everywhere,
Honour, and gold, and women kind and fair.
And ye, O lords, to-morrow ere midday,
Come hither to my house in great array,
For then this marriage will we solemnise,
Appeasing all the gods with gifts of price."

Then loud all shouted, and the end of day
Being come, Andromeda was led away
Unto her bower, and there within a while
She fell asleep, and in her sleep did smile,
For on the calm of that forgetfulness
Her bliss but happy longings did impress.

But in the Syrian King's adorned hall
Sat Perseus till the shadows 'gan to fall
Shorter beneath the moon, and still he thought
Amid the feast of what a day had brought
Unto his heart, a foolish void before,
And for the morrow must he long so sore
That all those joyances and minstrelsy
Seemed unto him but empty things to be.

Early next morn the city was astir,
And country folk came in from far and near
Hearing the joyous tidings that the beast
Was dead, and fain to see the marriage feast.

And joyous folk wandered from street to street
Crowned with fair flowers and singing carols sweet.

Then to the maiden's chamber maidens came,
And woke her up to love and joyous shame,
And as the merry sun streamed through the room
Spread out unequalled marvels of the loom,
Stored up for such an end in days long done,
Ere yet her grey eyes looked upon the sun,
Fine webs like woven mist, wrought in the dawn,
Long ere the dew had left the sunniest lawn,
Gold cloth so wrought that nought of gold seemed there.
But rather sunlight over blossoms fair;
You would have said that gods had made them, bright,
To hide her body from the common light
Lest men should die from unfulfilled desire.

Gems too they showed wrought by the hidden fire
That eats the world, and from the unquiet sea
Pearls worth the ransom of an argosy.

Yet all too little all these riches seemed
In worship of her, who as one who dreamed,
By her fair maidens' hands was there arrayed,
Then, with loose hair, ungirded as a maid
Unto the threshold of the house was brought,
But when her hand familiar fingers caught
And when that voice, that erst amidst her fear
She deemed a god's, now smote upon her ear
Like one new-born to heaven she seemed to be

But dreamlike was the long solemnity,
Unreal the joyous streets, where yesterday

She passed half dead upon her wretched way :
And though before the flickering altar flame
She trembled when she thought of that past shame,
And midst the shouting knit her brows to think
Of what a cup these men had bidden her drink,
Unreal they seemed, forgotten as a tale
We cannot tell, though it may still avail
For pensive thoughts betwixt the day and night.

 All things unto the gods were done aright ;
Beside the sea the flame and smoke uprose
Over rich gifts of many things to those
A woman's tongue had wounded ; golden veils
And images, and bowls wrought o'er with tales,
By all the altars of the gods were laid ;
On this last day of maidenhood the maid
Had stood before the shrines, and there had thrown
Sweet incense on the flame, and through the town
The praises of immortals had been sung,
And sacred flowers about the houses hung ;
And now the last hours of the dreamlike day
Amid great feasting slowly passed away.

 But in that land there was a mighty lord,
To whom erewhile the King had pledged his word
That he should wed Andromeda, and he
Heard through sure friends of this festivity
And raged thereat, and thought that eve to come
Unbidden to the feast and bear her home ;
Phineus his name was, great amidst great men.

He setting out, came to the great hall when
The sun was well-nigh down, all armed was ne,
And at his back came on tumultuously
His armed men-slaves, and folk that loved him dear

Beholding him, the King rose up in fear,
And all about the place scared folk uprose
As men surprised at feast by deadly foes ;
But Perseus laughing said, " What feat do ye
'This eve in honour of my sweet and me ?
Or are ye but the servants of the King
Returned from doing for him some great thing
In a far land ? then sit here and be glad,
For on this day the King feeds good and bad."

Then inarticulate with rage and grief
Phineus turned on him, snatching at a sheaf
Of darts that hung against a pillar there,
And hurled one at him, that sung through his hair
And slew a serving varlet by his side ;
'Then finding voice, he faced the King and cried,
" What dost thou drinking with this robber here,
Who comes to steal that which I hold so dear
That on my knees I prayed for her to thee ?
Speak, Cepheus ! wilt thou give her yet to me
And have good peace withal, or wilt thou die ?
Ho, friends, and ye that follow, cry my cry !"

Then straight the hall rang with a mighty shout
Of " Phineus," and from sheath and belt leapt out
The gleaming steel, and Cepheus stammering

Took heart to say. "Think well upon this thing ;
What should I do ? the man did save her life,
And her he might have made his slave, as wife
He asks for now ; take gifts and go thy way
Nor quench in blood the joyance of this day."

Then forth stood Perseus with a frowning face
Before them all, and cried out from his place,
"Get ye behind my back, all friends to me !
And ere the lamps are lighted ye shall see
A stranger thing than ye have ever dreamed ;"
And as he spake in his left hand there gleamed
The gold-wrought satchel ; but amazed and cowed
Did the King's friends behind the hero crowd.
Who, ere from out the bag he drew the head,
Unto that band of fierce new-comers said ;
"Will ye have life or death ? if life, then go
And on the grass outside your armour throw,
And then returning, drink to my delight
Until the summer sun puts out the night."

But loud they shouted, swaying to and fro,
And mocked at him, and cried aloud to know
If in his hand Jove's thunderbolt he had,
Or Mars' red sword that makes the eagles glad ;
But Phineus, raging, cried, "Take him alive,
That we for many an hour the wretch may drive
With thongs and clubs until he longs to die !"

Then all set on him with a mighty cry,
But, with a shout that thrilled high over theirs.
He drew the head out by the snaky hairs

And turned on them the baleful glassy eyes ;
Then sank to silence all that storm of cries
And clashing arms ; the tossing points that shone
In the last sunbeams, went out one by one
As the sun left them, for each man there died,
E'en as the shepherd on the bare hill-side,
Smitten amid the grinding of the storm ;
When, while the hare lies flat in her wet form,
E'en strong men quake for fear in houses strong,
And nigh the ground the lightning runs along.

But upright on their feet the dead men stood,
In brow and cheek still flushed the angry blood ;
This smiled, the mouth of that was open wide,
This other drew the great sword from his side,
All were at point to do this thing or that.

But silent in the hall the living sat
As those dead men, till Perseus turned at last
And over all a kingly look he cast,
And said, " O friends, drink yet one cup to me,
And then to-morrow will I try the sea
With this my love ; and, sweet Andromeda,
Forgive me that I needs must play this play ;
Forget it, sweet ! thou wilt not see again
This land of thine, upland, or hill, or plain ;
There where we go shall all be new to thee
Except the love that thou hast won from me."
Then to her frightened face there came a smile,
And in her cheeks within a little while

Sweet colour came again ; but right few words
Upon that night were said of king or lords.

But soon again the lovers were alone
Of all the sons of men remembering none,
Forgetting every god but him whose bow
About the vexed and flowery earth doth go.

SO on the morn, when risen was the sun
About the capstan did the shipmen run.
Warping the great ship to the harbour mouth
That yearly went for treasures to the south,
And thither from the palace did men bear
Bales of rich cloth, and golden vessels rare,
And gold new coined, and silver bars of weight.
And women-slaves with bodies slim and straight
Stood on the snow-white deck, and strong men-slaves
Brought from some conquered land beyond the waves
Bore down rich burdens ; so when all things due
Were laid on ship-board, and to noon it grew
Thither came Perseus with his new-wed wife,
And she, as losing somewhat of her life
Was pensive now, and silent, and regret
Moved in her that her heart must soon forget
All folk and things where first her life began,

Yea, e'en the mother, whose worn face and wan,
Tearless and haughty, yet looked o'er the sea,
As though the life wherein no good could be
She still would bear in every god's despite —
—Ah, folk forget ; the damsel's heart grew light
E'en while her country's cliffs she yet could see.
Should she remember, when so lovingly
That cheek touched hers, and he was hers alone ?

Love while ye may ; if twain grow into one
'Tis for a little while ; the time goes by,
No hatred 'twixt the pair of friends doth lie,
No troubles break their hearts—and yet, and yet—
How could it be ? we strove not to forget ;
Rather in vain to that old time we clung,
Its hopes and wishes round our hearts we hung,
We played old parts, we used old names—in vain,
We go our ways, and twain once more are twain ;
Let pass—at latest when we come to die
Thus shall the fashion of the world go by.

But these, while still at brightest love's flame burned,
Were glad indeed, as towards Seriphos turned
Bright shone their gilded prow against the sun.

Meanwhile the folk of Joppa, one by one,
Took Phineus' people and their master dead
All turned to stone as they had seen the head,
And in a lonely place they set them down,
Upon a hill that overlooked the town,

And round about them built a wall, four-square,
And at each corner raised a temple fair,
And therein altars made they unto Jove,
Pallas, and Neptune, and the God of Love ;
And in Jove's temple carved that history,
That those who came there after them might see,
From first to last, how all these things were done,
And how these men last looked upon the sun.

But the two lovers going on their way
Grew happier still, as bright day followed day ;
And, the wind favouring, in a little while
They reached the low shore of the friendly isle ;
And, having beached the well-built keel, took land
Where Danaë's boat first touched the yellow sand.
Then cityward alone did Perseus go
His fatal gift unto the King to show ;
And, passing through the fair fields hastily,
Reached the green precinct, where he thought to see
His mother, he had left alive and well ;
But from inside upon his ears there fell
A noise of shrieks and clashing arms and shouts ;
Thereto he ran beset with many doubts,
Since Polydectes' evil wiles he knew,
And what a fate he erst had doomed him to ;
So, hurrying through, he reached the shrine at last,
And there beheld his mother, her arms cast
About Minerva's image, and by her
Good Dictys, who, with shield and glittering spear,

Abode the onslaught of an armed band,
At head of whom did Polydectes stand.

Then to her side sprang Perseus with a cry,
And at that sight and sound she spake on high
"Com'st thou, long looked for? nothing fear I now,
This kingly traitor soon shall lie alow."

Then the King tottered backward, and awhile
Stood staring at him: but an evil smile
Soon hid his fear, as, turning, he beheld
The glittering weapons that his stout slaves heid,
And he cried out, "Yea, art thou back again?
And was my story forged for thee in vain?
Be merry then, but give me place or die!
I am not one to meet thee fearfully.
But thee, O brother, must I then slay thee,
And in our house must one more story be?
Give back! nor for a woman's foolishness,
Bring curses on the name thou shouldest bless.
—Set on at once then! take the three of them!"

Then once more clashed the spears, but on the hem
Of that dread satchel Perseus set his hand,
And put his friend aside, and took his stand
Betwixt his mother and the island men;
And terribly he cried, "Thus take thou then
The gift thou badst me bring to thee! nor ask
Of any man again another task,
Except to throw on thee a little sand
That thou may'st reach in peace the shadowy land."
His mocking speech he ended with a shout,

And from the bag the dreadful head drew out
And shook it in the King's bewildered face ;
Who unto him yet strove to make one pace
With feebly brandished spear and drooping shield
Then unto stony death his heart did yield,
And without any cry upright he died,
With fallen arms and fixed eyes staring wide
But of his men the bravest turned and fled,
And on the ground some trembled, well-nigh dead
For very fear, till Perseus cried, " Arise,
Lay down your arms and go ! Henceforth be wise,
Nor at kings' biddings 'gainst the just gods strive."
But as they slunk away, too glad to live
To need more words, and shivering with their dread,
Once more did Perseus hide the fearful head.
And toward his mother turned ; who, with pale face,
Stood trembling there, remembering that embrace
Within the brazen house ; but now he threw
His arms about her as he used to do
When her own arms his little body bore ;
And smiling, even as he smiled of yore,
He said, " O mother, fear me not at all,
But yet bethink thee of the brazen wall
And golden Jove, nor doubt from him I came
And no more now shall I be called thy shame,
But thy defence and glory everywhere.

“ But now to lovely Argos let us fare,
Too small a land this is become for thee,

And I may hope a greater sovereignty,
Who, by God's help, have done such mighty things,
Which I will tell thee of, while the wind sings
Amongst the shrouds of my rich-laden keel,
While by thy feet a god-given gift shall kneel,
My bride new won ; in such-like guise will we
Come back to him who gave us to the sea,
And make our peace and all ill blood forget,
That through long happy years thou mayst live yet."

Then did he take good Dictys by the hand,
And said, " O righteous man, we leave this land,
Nor leave thee giftless for the welcoming
Thou gav'st us erst, nor for this other thing
That thou hast wrought for us this happy tide ;
Therefore do thou as King herein abide,
And win Jove's love by helping in such wise
As thou didst us, folk sunk in miseries."

So gave he kingdoms, as he took away,
For strong the God was in him on that day,
And the gods smiled to hear him ; yea, and she
Who armed him erst, then dealt so lovingly,
She caused the people's hearts towards him to yearn,
Who, thronging round, began somehow to learn
The story of his deeds, and cried aloud,
" Be thou our King !" Then showed he to the crowd
Dictys his friend, and said, " I to my kin
Must go, mine heritage and goods to win,
And deal a king with kings ; but yet see here
This royal man, my helpful friend and dear ;

Loved of the gods, surely he is of worth
For greater things." So saying he went forth
And midst their reverence, leading by the hand
His happy mother, turned into the strand ;
And still the wondering folk with them must go,
And now such honour unto him would show,
That rather they would make him God than King
But while fresh carols round him these did sing
They came unto the low, sea-beaten sand ;
And Danaë took the Syrian by the hand
And kissed her, full of joy that such an one
Should bear brave children to her godlike son :
Then Perseus gave command, and on the shore
Great gifts they laid from out his plenteous store,
To glad King Dictys' eyes withal, and then
Bade farewell to him and his island men ;
And all took ship, and hoisting sail straightway,
Departed o'er the restless plain and grey.

Now fair the wind was for a day and night,
But on the second day as it grew light,
And they were thinking that they soon should be
At Argos, rose a tempest on the sea,
And drave them from their course unto a land
Far north thereof. So on the yellow sand
They hauled their ship, and thereto presently
The good folk of the country drew anigh,
To make their market ; and, being asked, they said
That this was Thessaly, that strait paths led

Through rugged mountains to a fertile plain
Penëus watered, rich with many a fane :
That following down the stream they soon should come
Unto a mighty people's glorious home,
A god-loved ancient city, called of men
Larissa, and the time was fitting then
To go thereto, and there should they have rest,
For now each comer was an honoured guest,
Because Teutamias, the Thessalian king,
His father dead with games was honouring.

Then to that city Perseus fain would go,
His might unto the gathered men to show ;
Desiring, too, to gather tidings there
(Of how the old Acrisius yet might fare,
And if unto his scarce-seen Argive home
He in good peace might venture now to come.
So of the country folk he took fair steeds
And gave them gold, and goods for all their needs
And with a trusty band with this intent
Through the rough passes of the hills he went,
Bearing his mother, and the Syrian may :
As of a king's men deemed of his array,
When to the fertile peopled fields he came ;
But yet he bade that none should tell his name.
So coming to Larissa, all men thought,
That he who with him such great marvels brought
Was some great king, though scanty was his band ;
So honour did he get on every hand.
But when the games began, and none could win

A prize in any, if he played therein,
A greater name they gave him, saying, "What worth
In this poor age is left upon the earth
To do such deeds? Surely no man this is,
But some god weary of the heavenly bliss."

At last, when all the other games were done,
Men fell to play at casting of the stone;
And strong men cast it, mighty of their hands,
Bearers of great names in the Grecian lands:
But Perseus stood and watched the play alone,
Nor did he move when every man had thrown.
Then cried Teutamias, "Nameless one I see now
How mightily these strong-armed heroes throw:
Canst thou prevail in this as in the rest?"

"O King!" said Perseus, "now I think it best
To try the Fates no more; I must be gone:
Therefore to-day thou seest me thus alone,
For in the house my white-armed damsels stay
To order matters for our homeward way."

"Nay, stranger," said the King, "but rather take
This golden garland for Teutamias' sake,
And try one cast: look, here I have with me
A well-loved guest, who is most fain to see
Thy godlike strength, yea we will draw anigh
To watch the heavy stone like Jove's bolt fly
Forth from thine hand." Then Perseus smiled and said,
"Nay then, be wary, and guard well thine head!
For who of mortals knoweth where and when
The bolts of Jove shall smite down foolish men?"

So said he, and withal the King drew nigh,
And with him an old man, who anxiously
Peered round him as if looking for a foe
Then Perseus made him ready for the throw,
But even as he stooped the stone to raise,
The old man said, " That I the more may praise
This hero's cast, come to the other end
And we shall see the hill of granite send
The earth and stones up as its course is spent.
So then beyond the furthest cast they went
By some three yards, and stood aside ; but now
Since it was evening and the sun was low
Its beams were in their eyes, nor could they see
If Perseus moved or not, then restlessly
Looking this way or that, the ancient man,
Gathering his garments up, in haste began
To cross the place, but when a warning shout
Rang in his ears, then wavering and in doubt
He stopped, and scarcely had he time to hear
A second cry of horror and of fear,
Ere crushed, and beaten down upon the ground,
The end of all his weary life he found.

Then women shrieked, and strong men shouted out
And Perseus ran to those that drew about
The slain old man, and asked them of his name.
But the King, eyeing him as nigh he came,
Said " This we know, and thy hid name we know,
For certainly thou art his fated foe,

His very daughter's strange-begotten son,
The child the sea cast up, the dreaded one.
This was Acrisius, who for fear of thee
Shut up thy mother by the sounding sea ;
This was the man, who, for the very dread
Of meeting thee, from lovely Argos fled
To be my guest. Nay, let thy sharp sword bide
Within its sheath, the world is fair and wide,
Nor have we aught to do to thee for this ;
Go then in peace, and live in woe or bliss
E'en as thou may'st, but stay with us no more.
Because we fear the gods may plague us sore
For this thy deed, though they would have it so."

Then soberly thenceforth did Perseus go
Unto his folk, and straightly told them all
That on that luckless day had chanced to fall ;
Wondering thereat, there made they no delay,
But down unto the sea they took their way ;
And much did Danaë ponder as they went
How the high gods had wrought out their intent.
And thinking on these things she needs must sigh
For pity of her sweet life passing by.

But when they reached the border of the sea,
Then Perseus said, " Though all unwittingly
I slew this man, and though perchance of right
His throne is mine, yet never will I fight
Against the just gods, and I fear the stain
Of kindred blood, if slaying him I gain

His kingdom and the city of my birth :
Now, therefore, since the gods have made the earth
Most fair in many places, let us go
Where'er the god-sent fated wind shall blow
The ship, that carries one the high gods love.
But first the bright-armed lovely maid of Jove
Here let us worship, on this yellow beach,
'That her, my helper erst, we may beseech
To grant us much, and first of all things, this,
A land where we may dwell awhile in bliss."

They heard him gladly, for the most of those
Were young, nor yet by mishaps and by foes
Had learned to think the world a dreary thing ;
So round about the altar did they sing
And feasted well, and when the day came round
(Once more, they went a-shipboard to the sound
Of trumpets and heart-moving melody,
And gave their rich keel to the restless sea.

Then for four days before the wind they drove,
Until at last in sight a new land hove
Their pilot called the coast of Argolis,
That rich in cattle and in horses is.

But landing there had Perseus' godlike fame
Gone on before him, and the people came
And cried upon him for their king and lord,
The people's saving shield and conquering sword ;
So in that land he failed not to abide,
And there with many rites he purified
His fated hands of that unlooked-for guilt :

And there a town within a while he built
Men call Mycenæ. Peaceful grew the land
The while the ivory rod was in his hand,
For robbers fled, and good men still waxed strong,
And in no house was any sound of wrong,
Until the Golden Age seemed there to be,
So steeped the land was in felicity.

Time past, and there his wife and mother died,
And he, no god, must lie down by their side,
While Alceus his first son reigned after him,
A conquering king, and fair, and strong of limb

But long ere this he did not fail to lay
The sacred things that brought him on his way
Within Minerva's temple; there with awe
'Twixt silver bars, all folk these marvels saw
But not for long, for on the twentieth day
From the fair temple were they snatched away
Though by the armed priests guarded faithfully.
But still the empty wallet there did lie
Wherein had Perseus borne the head with him,
Which still when his great deeds were waxing dim
Hung in the Maiden's temple near the shrine,
And folk would pour before it oil and wine.

And know besides, that from that very year
Those who are wise say that the Maid doth bear
Amidst her shield that awful snaky head
Whereby so many heedless ones are dead.

BEFORE the last words of his tale were done
The purple hills had hidden half the sun,
But when the story's death a silence made
Within the hall, in freshness and in shade
The trembling blossoms of the garden lay.

Few words at first the elder men could say,
For thinking how all stories end with this,
Whatever was the midway gain and bliss :
“ He died, and in his place was set his son ,
He died, and in a few days every one
Went on their way as though he had not been.”

Yet with the pictures that their eyes had seen,
As still from point to point that history past,
And round their thoughts its painted veil was cast,
Their hearts were softened, —far away they saw
That other world, that 'neath another law
Had lived and died ; when man might hope to see
Some earthly image of Divinity,
And yet not die, but, strengthened by the sight,
Cast fear away, and go from night to night,
Until to godlike life, though short, he came,
Amidst all losses winning hope of fame,
Nor losing joy the while his life should 'dure,
For that at least his valiant strife made sure,
That still in place of dreamy, youthful hope,
With slow decay and certain death could cope.

So mused the Wanderers, and awhile might deem
That world might not be quite an empty dream,
But dim foreshadowings of what yet might come
When they perforce must leave that new gained home
Foreshadowings mingled with the images
Of man's misdeeds in greater days than these.

With no harsh words their musing was undone,
The garden birds sang down the setting sun,
A rainy wind from 'twixt the trees arose,
And sang a mournful counterpoint to those ;
And, ere the rain amidst the dark could fall,
The minstrel's song was ringing through the hall.

WHEN April-tide was melting into May,
Within a hall that midst the gardens lay
These elders met, and having feasted well,
The time came round the wonted tale to tell.
Then spake a Wanderer : "Sirs, it happed to me,
Long years ago, to cross the narrow sea
That 'twixt us Drontheimers and England lies ;
Young was I then, and little thought these eye
Should see so many lands ere all was done

"But this land was a fair and fertile one,
As at that time, for April-tide it was,
Even as now ; well, sirs, it came to pass
That to this town or that we took our way,
Or in some abbey's gwesten-chamber lay,
And many tales we heard, some false, some true,
Of the ill deeds our fathers used to do
Within that land ; and still the tale would end,
'Yet did the Saint his Holy House defend ;'
Or, 'Sirs, their fury all was nought and vain.
And by our Earl the pirate king was slain.'
God wot, I laughed full often in my sleeve,
And could have told them stories, by their leave,
With other endings : but I held my tongue,
Let each king's deeds in his own land be sung,
And then will lies stretch far. Besides, these men
Were puffed up with their luck and glory then.

For at that tide, within the land of France,
 Unto their piping must all people dance. —
 —But let that pass, for Captain Rolf has told
 How, on the way, their king he did behold.

“ For other tales they told, and one of these
 Not all the washing of the troublous seas,
 Not all the changeful days whereof ye know,
 Have swept from out my memory ; even so
 Small things far off will be remembered clear
 When matters both more weighty, and more near,
 Are waxing dim to us. I, who have seen
 So many lands, and midst such marvels been,
 Clearer than these abodes of outland men,
 Can see above the green and unburnt fen
 The little houses of an English town,
 Cross-timbered, thatched with fen-reeds coarse and
 brown,
 And high o’er these, three gables, great and fair,
 That slender rods of columns do upbear
 Over the minster doors, and imagery
 Of kings, and flowers no summer field doth see,
 Wrought on those gables.—Yea, I heard withal,
 In the fresh morning air, the trowels fall
 Upon the stone, a thin noise far away ;
 For high up wrought the masons on that day,
 Since to the monks that house seemed scarcely well
 Till they had set a spire or pinnacle
 Each side the great porch. In that burgh I heard

This tale, and late have set down every word
That I remembered, when the thoughts would come
Of what we did in our deserted home,
And of the days, long past, when we were young,
Nor knew the cloudy woes that o'er us hung.
And howsoever I am now grown old,
Yet is it still the tale I then heard told
Within the guest-house of that minster-close,
Whose walls, like cliffs new-made, before us rose."

THE PROUD KING.

ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN King, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God ; but such a judgment fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end, humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour.

IN a far country that I cannot name,
And on a year long ages past away,
A King there dwelt, in rest and ease and fame,
And richer than the Emperor is to-day :
The very thought of what this man might say,
From dusk to dawn kept many a lord awake,
For fear of him did many a great man quake.

Young was he when he first sat on the throne,
And he was wedded to a noble wife,
But at the daïs must he sit alone,
Nor durst a man speak to him for his life,
Except with leave : nought knew he change or strife,
But that the years passed silently away,
And in his black beard gathered specks of grey.

Now so it chanced, upon a May morning,
Wakeful he lay when yet low was the sun,
Looking distraught at many a royal thing,
And counting up his titles one by one,
And thinking much of things that he had done ;
For full of life he felt, and hale and strong,
And knew that none durst say when he did wrong.

For no man now could give him dread or doubt,
The land was 'neath his sceptre far and wide,
And at his beck would well-armed myriads shout.
Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride,
Until at last he raised him up and cried,
“ What need have I for temple or for priest ?
Am I not God, whiles that I live at least ? ”

5 And yet withal that dead his fathers were,
He needs must think, that quick the years pass by ;
But he, who seldom yet had seen death near
Or heard his name, said, “ Still I may not die
Though underneath the earth my fathers lie ;
My sire indeed was called a mighty king,
Yet in regard of mine, a little thing

6 “ His kingdom was ; moreover his grandsire
To him was but a prince of narrow lands,
Whose father, though to things he did aspire
Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands,
Yet ruled some little town where now there stands

The kennel of my dogs ; then may not I
Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die ?

“ Since up the ladder ever we have gone
Step after step nor fallen back again ;
And there are tales of people who have won
A life enduring, without care or pain,
Or any man to make their wishes vain ;
Perchance this prize unwitting now I hold ;
For times change fast, the world is waxen old.”

So mid these thoughts once more he fell asleep,
And when he woke again, high was the sun,
Then quickly from his gold bed did he leap,
And of his former thoughts remembered none,
But said, “ To-day through green woods will we run
Nor shall to-day be worse than yesterday,
But better it may be, for game and play.”

So for the hunt was he apparelled,
And forth he rode with heart right well at ease ;
And many a strong, deep-chested hound they led,
Over the dewy grass betwixt the trees,
And fair white horses fit for the white knees
Of Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights
Betwixt the setting and the rising lights.

Now following up a mighty hart and swift
The King rode long upon that morning tide,

And since his horse was worth a kingdom's gift,
It chanced him all his servants to outride,
Until unto a shaded river-side
He came alone at hottest of the sun,
When all the freshness of the day was done.

Dismounting there, and seeing so far adown
The red-finned fishes o'er the gravel play,
It seemed that moment worth his royal crown
To hide there from the burning of the day,
Wherefore he did off all his rich array,
And tied his horse unto a neighbouring tree,
And in the water sported leisurely.

But when he was fulfilled of this delight
He gat him to the bank well satisfied,
And thought to do on him his raiment bright
And homeward to his royal house to ride ;
But 'mazed and angry, looking far and wide
Nought saw he of his horse and rich attire,
And 'gainst the thief 'gan threaten vengeance dire.

But little help his fury was to him,
So lustily he 'gan to shout and cry ,
None answered, still the lazy chub did swim
By inches 'gainst the stream ; away did fly
The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,
And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade,
Of such a helpless man not much afraid.

Weary of crying in that lonely place
He ceased at last, and thinking what to do,
E'en as he was, up stream he set his face,
Since not far off a certain house he knew
Where dwelt his ranger, a lord leal and true,
Who many a bounty at his hands had had,
And now to do him ease would be right glad.

Thither he hastened on, and as he went
The hot sun sorely burned his naked skin,
The whiles he thought, "When he to me has lent
Fine raiment, and at ease I sit within
His coolest chamber clad in linen thin,
And drinking wine, the best that he has got,
I shall forget this troublous day and hot."

Now note, that while he thus was on his way,
And still his people for their master sought,
There met them one who in the King's array
Bestrode his very horse, and as they thought
Was none but he in good time to them brought,
Therefore they hailed him King, and so all rode
From out the forest to his fair abode.

And there in royal guise he sat at meat,
Served, as his wont was, 'neath the canopy,
And there the hounds fawned round about his feet,
And there that city's elders did he see,
And with his lords took counsel what should be ;

And there at supper when the day waxed dim
The Queen within his chamber greeted him.

LEAVE we him there ; for to the ranger's gate
The other came, and on the horn he blew,
Till peered the wary porter through the grate
To see if he, perchance, the blower knew,
Before he should the wicket-gate undo ;
But when he saw him standing there, he cried,
"What dost thou, friend, to show us all thine hide ?

"We list not buy to-day or flesh or fell ;
Go home and get thyself a shirt at least,
If thou wouldst aught, for saith our vicar well,
'That God hath given clothes e'en to the beast."
Therewith he turned to go, but as he ceased
The King cried out, "Open, O foolish man !
I am thy lord and King, Jovinian ;

"Go now, and tell thy master I am here
Desiring food and clothes, and in this plight,
And then hereafter need'st thou have no fear,
Because thou didst not know me at first sight."
"Yea, yea, I am but dreaming in the night,"
The carle said, "and I bid thee, friend, to dream,
Come through ! here is no gate, it doth but seem."

With that his visage vanished from the grate
But when the King now found himself alone
He hurled himself against the mighty gate,
And beat upon it madly with a stone,
Half wondering midst his rage, how any one
Could live, if longed-for things he chanced to lack ;
But midst all this, at last the gate flew back,

And there the porter stood, brown-bill in hand,
And said, " Ah, fool, thou makest this ado,
Wishing before my lord's high seat to stand ;
Thou shalt be gladder soon hereby to go,
Or surely nought of handy blows I know.
Come, willy nilly, thou shalt tell this tale
Unto my lord, if aught it may avail."

With that his staff he handled, as if he
Would smite the King, and said, " Get on before !
St Mary ! now thou goest full leisurely,
Who, erewhile, fain wouldst batter down the door.
See now, if ere this matter is passed o'er,
I come to harm, yet thou shalt not escape,
Thy back is broad enow to pay thy jape."

Half blind with rage the King before him passed,
But nought of all he doomed him to durst say,
Lest he from rest nigh won should yet be cast,
So with a swelling heart he took his way,
Thinking right soon his shame to cast away,

And the carle followed still, ill satisfied
With such a wretched losel to abide.

Fair was the ranger's house and new and white,
And by the King built scarce a year ago,
And carved about for this same lord's delight
With woodland stories deftly wrought in stone ;
There oft the King was wont to come alone,
For much he loved this lord, who erst had been
A landless squire, a servant of the Queen.

Now long a lord and clad in rich attire,
In his fair hall he sat before the wine
Watching the evening sun's yet burning fire,
Through the close branches of his pleasance shine
In mood of him who deems himself divine,
Remembering not whereto we all must come,
Not thinking aught but of his happy home.

From just outside loud mocking merriment
He heard midst this ; and therewithal a squire
Came hurrying up, his laughter scarcely spent,
Who said, " My lord, a man in such attire
As Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire,
Who saith that thou wilt know him for the King,
Up from the gate John Porter needs must bring.

" He to the King is nothing like in aught
But that his beard he weareth in such guise

As doth my lord : wilt thou that he be brought ?
 Perchance some treason 'neath his madness lies."
 "Yea," saith the ranger, "that may well be wise,
 But haste, for now am I right well at ease,
 Nor would be wearied with such folk as these."

Then went the squire, and coming back again,
 'The porter and the naked King brought in,
 Who thinking now that this should end his pain,
 Forgot his fury and the porter's sin,
 And said, "Thou wonderest how I came to win
 'This raiment, that kings long have ceased to wear,
 Since Noah's flood has altered all the air?"

"Well, thou shalt know, but first I pray thee, Hugh,
 Reach me that cloak that lieth on the board,
 For certes, though thy folk are leal and true,
 It seemeth that they deem a mighty lord
 Is made by crown, and silken robe, and sword :
 Lo, such are borel folk ; but thou and I
 Fail not to know the signs of majesty.

"Thou risest not ! thou lookest strange on me !
 Ah, what is this ? Who reigneth in my stead ?
 How long hast thou been plotting secretly ?
 Then slay me now, for if I be not dead
 Armies will rise up when I nod my head.
 Slay me !—or cast thy treachery away,
 And have anew my favour from this day."

"Why should I tell thee that thou ne'er wast king?"

The ranger said, "thou knowest not my mind;
Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing,
And, ere thou diest send thee days more kind;
And help from us a-going shalt thou find.
Good fellows, this poor creature is but mad.
Take him, and in a coat let him be clad."

"And give him meat and drink, and on this night
Beneath some roof of ours let him abide,
For some day God may set his folly right."
Then spread the King his arms abroad and cried,
"Woe to thy food, thy house, and thee betide,
Thou loathsome traitor! Get ye from the hall,
Lest smitten by God's hand this roof should fall."

"Yea, if the world be but an idle dream,
And God deals nought with it, yet shall ye see
Red flame from out these carven windows stream
I, I, will burn this vile place utterly,
And strewn with salt the poisonous earth shall be
That such a wretch of such a man has made,
That so such Judases may grow afraid."

Thus raving, those who held him he shook off
And rushed from out the hall, nigh mad indeed,
And gained the gate, not heeding blow or scoff,
Nor longer of his nakedness took heed,

But ran, he knew not where, at headlong speed
 Till, when at last his strength was fully spent.
 Worn out, he fell beneath a woody bent.

But for the ranger, left alone in peace,
 He bade his folk bring in the minstrelsy ;
 And thinking of his life, and fair increase
 Of all his goods, a happy man was he,
 And towards his master felt right lovingly,
 And said, "This luckless madman will avail
 When next I see the King for one more tale."

MEANWHILE Jovinian by the roadside
 lay,
 Panting, confused, scarce knowing if he dreamed,
 Until at last, when vanished was the day,
 Through the dark night far off a bright light gleamed ;
 Which growing quickly, down the road there streamed
 The glare of torches, held by men who ran
 Before the litter of a mighty man.

These mixed with soldiers soon the road did fill,
 And on their harness could the King behold
 The badge of one erst wont to do his will,
 A counsellor, a gatherer-up of gold,
 Who underneath his rule had now grown old :

Then wrath and bitterness so filled his heart,
That from his wretched lair he needs must start.

And o'er the clatter shrilly did he cry,
"Well met, Duke Peter ! ever art thou wise ;
Surely thou wilt not let a day go by
Ere thou art good friends with mine enemies ;
O fit to rule within a land of lies,
Go on thy journey, make thyself more meet
To sit in hell beneath the devil's feet !"

But as he ceased a soldier drew anear,
And smote him flatling with his sheathéd sword,
And said, "Speak louder, that my lord may hear
And give thee wages for thy ribald word !
Come forth, for I must show thee to my lord,
For he may think thee more than mad indeed,
Who of men's ways has taken wondrous heed."

Now was the litter stayed midmost the road,
And round about, the torches in a ring
Were gathered, and their flickering light now glowed
In gold and gems and many a lordly thing,
And showed that face well known unto the King,
That, smiling yesterday, right humble words
Had spoken midst the concourse of the lords.

But now he said, "Man, thou wert cursing me
If these folk heard aright ; what wilt thou then,

Deem'st thou that I have done some wrong to thee,
Or hast thou scathe from any of my men?
In any case tell all thy tale again
When on the judgment-seat thou see'st me sit,
And I will give no careless ear to it."

"The night is dark, and in the summer wind
The torches flicker; canst thou see my face?
Bid them draw nigher yet, and call to mind
Who gave thee all thy riches and thy place
—Well;—if thou canst, deny me, with such grace
As by the fire-light Peter swore of old,
When in that Maundy-week the night was cold—

"—Alas! canst thou not see I am the King?"
So spoke he, as their eyes met midst the blaze,
And the King saw the dread foreshadowing
Within the elder's proud and stony gaze,
Of what those lips, thin with the lapse of days,
Should utter now; nor better it befall;—
"Friend, a strange story thou art pleased to tell

"Thy luck it is thou tellest it to me,
Who deem thee mad and let thee go thy way:
The King is not a man to pity thee,
Or on thy folly thy fool's tale to lay:
Poor fool! take this, and with the light of day
Buy food and raiment of some labouring clown,
And by my counsel keep thee from the town,

“For fear thy madness break out in some place
Where folk thy body to the judge must hale,
And then indeed wert thou in evil case—
Press on, sirs ! or the time will not avail.”
—There stood the King, with limbs that ’gan to fail,
Speechless, and holding in his trembling hand
A coin new stamped for people of the land ;

Thereon, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe,
The image of a King, himself, was wrought ;
His jewelled feet upon a quartered globe,
As though by him all men were vain and nought.
One moment the red glare the silver caught,
As the lord ceased, the next his hurrying folk
The flaring circle round the litter broke.

The next, their shadows barred a patch of light.
Fast vanishing, all else around was black ;
And the poor wretch, left lonely with the night,
Muttered, “I wish the day would ne’er come back
If all that once I had I now must lack :
Ah God ! how long is it since I was King,
Nor lacked enough to wish for anything?”

Then down the lonely road he wandered yet,
Following the vanished lights, he scarce knew why,
Till he began his sorrows to forget,
And, steeped in drowsiness, at last drew nigh
A grassy bank, where, worn with misery,

He slept the dreamless sleep of weariness,
That many a time such wretches' eyes will bless.

BUT at the dawn he woke, nor knew at first
What ugly chain of grief had brought him there,
Nor why he felt so wretched and accursed ;
At last remembering, the fresh morning air,
The rising sun, and all things fresh and fair,
Yet caused some little hope in him to rise,
That end might come to these new miseries.

So looking round about, he saw that he
To his own city gates was come anear ;
Then he arose and going warily,
And hiding now and then for very fear
Of folk who bore their goods and country cheer,
Unto the city's market, at the last
Unto a stone's-throw of the gate he passed.

But when he drew unto the very gate,
Into the throng of country-folk he came
Who for the opening of the door did wait,
Of whom some mocked, and some cried at him shame
And some would know his country and his name,
But one into his waggon drew him up,
And gave him milk from out a beechen cup,

And asked him of his name and misery ;
Then in his throat a swelling passion rose,
Which yet he swallowed down, and, " Friend," said he
" Last night I had the hap to meet the foes
(Of God and man, who robbed me, and with blows
Stripped off my weed and left me on the way :
Thoumas the Pilgrim am I called to-day.

" A merchant am I of another town,
And rich enow to pay thee for thy deed,
If at the King's door thou wilt set me down,
For there a squire I know, who at my need
Will give me food and drink, and fitting weed.
What is thy name ? in what place dost thou live ?
That I some day great gifts to thee may give."

" Fair sir," the carle said, " I am poor enow,
Though certes food I lack not easily ;
My name is Christopher a-Green ; I sow
A little orchard set with bush and tree,
And ever there the kind land keepeth me,
For I, now fifty, from a little boy
Have dwelt thereon, and known both grief and joy.

" The house my grandsire built there has grown old
And certainly a bounteous gift it were
If thou shouldst give me just enough of gold
To build it new ; nor shouldst thou lack my prayer
For such a gift." " Nay, friend, have thou no care,"

The King said: "this is but a little thing
To me, who oft am richer than the King."

Now as they talked the gate was opened wide,
And toward the palace went they through the street.
And Christopher walked ever by the side
Of his rough wain, where midst the May flowers sweet
Jovinian lay, that folk whom they might meet
Might see him not to mock at his bare skin:
So shortly to the King's door did they win.

Then through the open gate Jovinian ran
Of the first court, and no man stayed him there;
But as he reached the second gate, a man
Of the King's household, seeing him all bare
And bloody, cried out, "Whither dost thou fare?
Sure thou art seventy times more mad than mad,
Or else some magic potion thou hast had,

"Whereby thou fear'st not steel or anything."
"But," said the King, "good fellow, I know thee;
And can it be thou knowest not thy King?
Nay, thou shalt have a good reward of me,
'That thou wouldst rather have than ten years' fee,
If thou wilt clothe me in fair weed again,
For now to see my council am I fain."

"Out, ribald!" quoth the fellow: "What say'st thou?
Thou art my lord, whom God reward and bless?

'Truly before long shalt thou find out how
John Hangman cureth ill folk's wilfulness ;
Yea, from his scourge the blood has run for less
Than that which now thou sayest : nay, what say I ?
For lighter words have I seen tall men die.

" Come now, the sergeants to this thing shall see !"
So to the guard-room was Jovinian brought,
Where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly,
And all his desperate words they heeded nought ;
Until at last there came to him this thought,
'That never from this misery should he win,
But, spite of all his struggles, die therein.

And terrible it seemed, that everything
So utterly was changed since yesterday,
'That these who were the soldiers of the King,
Ready to lie down in the common way
Before him, nor durst rest if he bade play,
Now stood and mocked him, knowing not the face
At whose command each man there had his place.

" Ah, God !" said he, " is this another earth
From that whereon I stood two days ago ?
Or else in sleep have I had second birth ?
(Or among mocking shadows do I go,
Unchanged myself of flesh and fell, although
My fair weed I have lost and royal gear ?
And meanwhile all are changed that meet me here ;

“And yet in heart and nowise outwardly.”
Amid his wretched thoughts two sergeants came,
Who said, “Hold, sirs! because the King would see
The man who thus so rashly brings him shame,
By taking his high style and spotless name,
That never has been questioned ere to day.
Come, fool! needs is it thou must go our way.”

So at the sight of him all men turned round,
As 'twixt these two across the courts he went,
With downcast head and hands together bound ;
While from the windows maid and varlet leant,
And through the morning air fresh laughter sent ;
Until unto the threshold they were come
Of the great hall within that kingly home.

Therewith right fast Jovinian's heart must beat,
As now he thought, “Lo, here shall end the strife :
For either shall I sit on mine own seat,
Known unto all, soldier and lord and wife,
Or else is this the ending of my life,
And no man henceforth shall remember me,
And a vain name in records shall I be.”

Therewith he raised his head up, and beheld
One clad in gold set on his royal throne,
Gold-crowned, whose hand the ivory sceptre held ;
And underneath him sat the Queen alone,
Ringed round with standing lords, of whom not one

Did aught but utmost reverence unto him ;
Then did Jovinian shake in every limb.

Yet midst amaze and rage to him it seemed
This man was nowise like him in the face ;
But with a marvellous glory his head gleamed,
As though an angel sat in that high place,
Where erst he sat like all his royal race,—
—But their eyes met, and with a stern, calm brow
The shining one cried out, “ And where art thou ?

“ Where art thou, robber of my majesty ? ”
“ Was I not King,” he said, “ but yesterday ?
And though to-day folk give my place to thee,
I am Jovinian ; yes, though none gainsay,
If on these very stones thou shouldst me slay,
And though no friend be left for me to moan,
I am Jovinian still, and King alone.”

Then said that other, “ O thou foolish man,
King was I yesterday, and long before,
Nor is my name aught but Jovinian,
Whom in this house the Queen my mother bore.
Unto my longing father, for right sore
Was I desired before I saw the light ;
Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right.

“ And surely well thou meritest to die ;
Yet ere I bid men lead thee unto death

Hearken to these my lords that stand anigh,
And what this faithful Queen beside me saith,
Then may'st thou many a year hence draw thy breath,
If these should stammer in their speech one whit.
Behold this face, lords, look ye well on it!

"Thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this!"
Then cried they, "Hail, O Lord Jovinian!
Long may'st thou live!" and the Queen knelt to kiss
His gold-shod feet, and through her face there ran
Sweet colour, as she said, "Thou art the man
By whose side I have lain for many a year,
Thou art my lord Jovinian lief and dear."

Then said he, "O thou wretch, hear now and see!
What thing should hinder me to slay thee now?
And yet indeed, such mercy is in me,
If thou wilt kneel down humbly and avow
Thou art no King, but base-born, as I know
Thou art indeed, in mine house shalt thou live,
And as thy service is, so shalt thou thrive."

But the unhappy King laughed bitterly,
The red blood rose to flush his visage wan
Where erst the grey of death began to be;
'Thou liest," he said, "I am Jovinian,
Come of great kings; nor am I such a man
As still to live when all delight is gone,
As thou might'st do, who sittest on my throne."

No answer made the other for a while,
But sat and gazed upon him steadfastly,
Until across his face there came a smile,
Where scorn seemed mingled with some great pity.
And then he said, "Nathless thou shalt not die,
But live on as thou mayst, a lowly man
Forgetting thou wast once Jovinian."

Then wildly round the hall Jovinian gazed,
Turning about to many a well-known face,
But none of all his folk seemed grieved or mazed,
But stood unmoved, each in his wonted place ;
There were the Lords, the Marshal with his mace,
The Chamberlain, the Captain of the Guard,
Grey-headed, with his wrinkled face and hard,

That had peered down so many a lane of war ;
There stood the grave ambassadors arow,
Come from half-conquered lands ; without the bar
The foreign merchants gazed upon the show,
Willing new things of that great land to know ;
Nor was there any doubt in any man
That the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Yea, as the sergeants laid their hands on him,
The mighty hound that crouched before the throne,
Flew at him fain to tear him limb from limb,
Though in the woods, the brown bear's dying groan,
He and that beast had often heard alone.

"Ah!" muttered he, "take thou thy wages too
Worship the risen sun as these men do."

They thrust him out, and as he passed the door,
The murmur of the stately court he heard
Behind him, and soft footfalls on the floor,
And, though by this somewhat his skin was seared,
Hung back at the rough eager wind afeard ;
But from the place they dragged him through the gate,
Wherethrough he oft had rid in royal state.

Then down the streets they led him, where of old,
He, coming back from some well-finished war,
Had seen the line of flashing steel and gold
Wind upwards 'twixt the houses from the bar,
While clashed the bells from wreathed spires afar ;
Now moaning, as they haled him on, he said,
"God and the world against one lonely head !"

BUT soon, the bar being past they loosed their hold,
And said, "Thus saith by us our Lord the King,
Dwell now in peace, but yet be not so bold
To come again, or to thy lies to cling.
Lest unto thee there fall a worser thing ;
And for ourselves we bid thee ever pray
For him who has been good to thee this day."

Therewith they turned away into the town,
And still he wandered on and knew not where,
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown,
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,
'That ran in pools and shallows here and there,
And on the further side of it a wood,
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

Gazing thereat, it came into his mind
A priest dwelt there, a hermit wise and old,
Whom he had ridden oftentimes to find,
In days when first the sceptre he did hold,
And unto whom his mind he oft had told,
And had good counsel from him, though indeed
A scanty crop had sprung from that good seed.

Therefore he passed the brook with heavy cheer
And toward the little house went speedily,
And at the door knocked, trembling with his fear,
Because he thought, "Will he remember me?
If not, within me must there surely be
Some devil who turns everything to ill,
And makes my wretched body do his will."

So, while such doleful things as this he thought,
There came unto the door the holy man,
Who said, "Good friend, what tidings hast thou
brought?"

"Father," he said, "knowest thou Jovinian?"

Know'st thou me not, made naked, poor, and wan?
 Alas, O father! am I not the King,
 The rightful lord of thee and everything?"

"Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale!"
 The hermit said; "if thou seek'st soul's health here,
 Right little will such words as this avail;
 It were a better deed to shrive thee clear,
 And take the pardon Christ has bought so dear,
 Than to an ancient man such mocks to say
 That would be fitter for a Christmas play."

So to his hut he got him back again,
 And fell the unhappy King upon his knees,
 And unto God at last he did complain,
 Saying, "Lord God, what bitter things are these?
 What hast thou done, that every man that sees
 This wretched body, of my death is fain?
 O Lord God, give me back myself again!"

"E'en if therewith I needs must die straightway,
 Indeed I know that since upon the earth
 I first did go, I ever day by day
 Have grown the worse, who was of little worth
 E'en at the best time since my helpless birth.
 And yet it pleased thee once to make me King,
 Why hast thou made me now this wretched thing?"

"Why am I hated so of every one?"

Wilt thou not let me live my life again,
Forgetting all the deeds that I have done,
Forgetting my old name, and honours vain,
That I may cast away this lonely pain?
Yet if thou wilt not, help me in this strife,
That I may pass my little span of life,

“Not made a monster by unhappiness.
What shall I say? thou mad'st me weak of will,
Thou wrapped'st me in ease and carelessness,
And yet, as some folk say, thou lovest me still;
Look down, of folly I have had my fill,
And am but now as first thou madest me,
Weak, yielding clay to take impress of thee.”

So said he weeping, and but scarce had done,
When yet again came forth that hermit old,
And said, “Alas! my master and my son,
Is this a dream my wearied eyes behold?
What doleful wonder now shall I be told,
Of that ill world that I so long have left?
What thing thy glory from thee has bereft?”

A strange surprise of joy therewith there came
To that worn heart; he said, “For some great sin
The Lord my God has brought me unto shame;
I am unknown of servants, wife, and kin,
Unknown of all the lords that stand within
My father's house; nor didst thou know me more

When e'en just now I stood before thy door.

“ Now since thou know'st me, surely God is good,
And will not slay me, and good hope I have
Of help from Him that died upon the rood,
And is a mighty lord to slay and save :
So now again these blind men will I brave,
If thou wilt give me of thy poorest weed,
And some rough food, the which I sorely need ;

“ Then of my sins thou straight shalt shrive me
clean.”

Then weeping said the holy man, “ Dear lord,
What heap of woes upon thine head has been ;
Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord,
And what scant food my hovel can afford ;
And tell me everything thou hast to say ;
And then the High God speed thee on thy way.”

So when in coarse serge raiment he was clad,
He told him all that pride had made him think ;
And showed him of his life both good and bad ;
And then being houselled, did he eat and drink,
While in the wise man's heart his words did sink,
For, “ God be praised ! ” he thought, “ I am no king
Who scarcely shall do right in anything ! ”

Then he made ready for the King his ass,
And bade again, God speed him on the way

And down the road the King made haste to pass
As it was growing toward the end of day,
With sober joy for troubles passed away ;
But trembling still, as onward he did ride,
Meeting few folk upon that even-tide.

SO to the city gate being come at last,
He noted there two ancient warders stand,
Whereof one looked askance as he went past,
And whispered low behind his held-up hand
Unto his mate, " The King, who gave command
That if disguised this eve he pass this gate,
No reverence we should do his kingly state."

Thereat with joy, Jovinian smiled again,
And so passed onward quickly down the street ;
And well-nigh was he eased of all his pain
When he beheld the folk that he might meet
Gaze hard at him, as though they fain would greet
His well-known face, but durst not, knowing well
He would not any of his state should tell.

Withal unto the palace being come,
He lighted down thereby and entered,
And once again it seemed his royal home.
For folk again before him bowed the head ;

And to him came a Squire, who softly said,
"The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,
Within the little hall where minstrels sing,

"Since there thou badst her meet thee on this night"
"Lead on then!" said the King, and in his heart
He said, "Perfay all goeth more than right
And I am King again;" but with a start
He thought of him who played the kingly part
That morn, yet said, "If God will have it so
This man like all the rest my face will know."

So in the Little Hall the Queen he found,
Asleep, as one a spell binds suddenly;
For her fair broidery lay upon the ground,
And in her lap her open hand did lie,
The silken-threaded needle close thereby;
And by her stood that image of the King
In rich apparel, crown and signet-ring.

But when the King stepped forth with angry eye
And would have spoken, came a sudden light,
And changed was that other utterly;
For he was clad in robe of shining white,
Inwrought with flowers of unnamed colours bright.
Girt with a marvellous girdle, and whose hem
Fell to his naked feet and shone in them;

And from his shoulders did two wings arise,

That with the swaying of his body, played
This way and that ; of strange and lovely dyes
Their feathers were, and wonderfully made :
And now he spoke, " () King, be not dismayed,
Or think my coming here so strange to be,
For oft ere this have I been close to thee.

"And now thou knowest in how short a space
The God that made the world can unmake thee,
And though He alter in no whit thy face,
Can make all folk forget thee utterly,
That thou to-day a nameless wretch mayst be,
Who yesterday woke up without a peer,
The wide world's marvel and the people's fear.

"Behold, thou oughtest to thank God for this,
That on the hither side of thy dark grave
Thou well hast learned how great a God He is
Who from the heavens such countless rebels drave,
Yet turns himself such folk as thee to save ;
For many a man thinks nought at all of it.
Till in a darksome land he comes to sit,

"Lamenting everything : so do not thou !
For inasmuch as thou thoughtst not to die
This thing may happen to thee even now,
Because the day unspeakable draws nigh,
When bathed in unknown flame all things shall lie ;
And if thou art upon God's side that day,
Unslain, thine earthly part shall pass away.

“ Or if thy body in the grave must rot,
Well mayst thou see how small a thing is this,
Whose pain of yesterday now hurts thee not.
Now thou hast come again to earthly bliss,
Though bitter-sweet thou knowest well this is,
And though no coming day can ever see
Ending of happiness where thou mayst be.

“ Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me more,
Until the day, when, unto thee at least
This world is gone, and an unmeasured shore,
Where all is wonderful and changed, thou seest :
Therefore, farewell ! at council and at feast
Thy nobles shalt thou meet as thou hast done,
Nor wilt thou more be strange to any one.”

So scarce had he done speaking, ere his wings
Within the doorway of the hall did gleam,
And then he vanished quite ; and all these things
Unto Jovinian little more did seem
Than some distinct and well-remembered dream,
From which one wakes amidst a feverish night,
Taking the moonshine for the morning light.

Silent he stood, not moving for a while.
Pondering o'er all these wondrous things, until
The Queen arose from sleep, and with a smile,
Said, “ O fair lord, your great men by your will
E'en as I speak the banquet-chamber fill,

To greet thee amidst joy and revelling,
Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King?"

So from that place of marvels having gone,
Half mazed, he soon was clad in rich array,
And sat thereafter on his kingly throne,
As though no other had sat there that day ;
Nor did a soul of all his household say
A word about the man, who on that morn
Had stood there, naked, helpless, and forlorn.

But ever day by day the thought of it
Within Jovinian's heart the clearer grew,
As o'er his head the ceaseless time did flit,
And everything still towards its ending drew,
New things becoming old, and old things new ;
Till, when a moment of eternity
Had passed, grey-headed did Jovinian lie

One sweet May morning, wakeful in his bed ;
And thought, " That day is thirty years a-gone
Since useless folly came into my head,
Whereby, before the steps of mine own throne,
I stood in helpless agony alone,
And of the wondrous things that there befell,
When I am gone there will be none to tell :

" No man is now alive who thinks that he,
Who bade thrust out the madman on that tide.

Was other than the King they used to see :
Long years have passed now, since the hermit died,
So must I tell the tale, ere by his side
I lie, lest it be unrecorded quite,
Like a forgotten dream in morning light.

“Yea, lest I die ere night come, this same day
Unto some scribe will I tell everything,
That it may lie when I am gone away,
Stored up within the archives of the King ,
And may God grant the words thereof may ring
Like His own voice in the next comer's ears !
Whereby his folk shall shed the fewer tears.”

So it was done, and at the King's command
A clerk that day did note it every whit,
And after by a man of skilful hand
In golden letters fairly was it writ ;
Yet little heed the new King took of it
That filled the throne when King Jovinian died
So much did all things feed his swelling pride.

But whether God chastised him in his turn,
And he grew wise thereafter, I know not ;
I think by eld alone he came to learn
How lowly on some day must be his lot.
But ye, O Kings, think all that ye have got
To be but gawds cast out upon some heap,
And stolen the while the Master was asleep.

THE story done, for want of happier things,
Some men must even fall to talk of kings ;
Some trouble of a far-off Grecian isle,
Some hard Sicilian craftsman's cruel guile
Whereby he raised himself to be as God,
'Till good men slew him ; the fell Persian rod
As blighting as the deadly pestilence,
The brazen net of armed men from whence
Was no escape ; The fir-built Norway hall
Filled with the bonders waiting for the fall
Of the great roof whereto the torch is set ;
'The laughing mouth, beneath the eyes still wet
With more than sea-spray, as the well-loved land
The freeman still looks back on, while his hand
Clutches the tiller, and the eastern breeze
Grows fresh and fresher : many things like these
They talked about, till they seemed young again,
Remembering what a glory and a gain
'Their fathers deemed the death of kings to be.

And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully
For thinking how few men escape the yoke,
From this or that man's hand, and how most folk
Must needs be kings and slaves the while they live,
And take from this man, and to that man give
Things hard enow. Yet as they mused, again
The minstrels raised some high heroic strain
That led men on to battle in old times ;
And midst the glory of its mingling rhymes,
Their hard hearts softened, and strange thoughts arose
Of some new end to all life's cruel toes.



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